OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

retro GAMER

A TRIBUTE TO DOMARK

DOMINIC WHEATLEY REVISITS THE PUBLISHER'S MOST ICONIC GAMES

THE MAKING OF EARTHWORM JIM 2

HOW SHINY PULLED OFF ITS OUTRAGEOUSLY WACKY SEQUEL

HANDS-ON G'AIM'E

IS THE AI-POWERED LIGHTGUN WORTH BUYING?

RETRO GAMER'S GUIDE TO THE N64

OUR PICKS FOR NINTENDO'S GROUND-BREAKING CONSOLE – HOW MANY DO YOU OWN?

ALSO INSIDE

WARTECH: SENKO NO RONDE
NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
COVERMOUNT CORNER
CONTRA: HARD CORPS
COMMODORE 128
HOMEBREW
SKY JINKS
WIZBALL

THE EVOLUTION OF METROID PRIME

INTREPID BOUNTY HUNTERS ON TAKING NINTENDO'S CULT SERIES INTO THE WORLD OF CUTTING-EDGE 3D

ULTIMATE GUIDE: QUACKSHOT
IN FOR A DUCK: REPLAYING SEGA'S MEGA DRIVE JEWEL

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THE RETROBATES

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE NINTENDO 64 GAME?

DARRAN JONES

Treasure's *Sin & Punishment* is an astonishing run-and-gun that pushes Nintendo's console to the absolute limits. It's genuinely superb.
Expertise: Juggling a gorgeous wife, two beautiful girls and an award-winning magazine, all under one roof!
Currently playing: *The Witcher III: Wild Hunt*
Favourite game of all time: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*

TIM EMPEY

The Legend Of Zelda: Ocarina Of Time. I didn't actually get to play it until about 2003, but that was some good gaming.
Expertise: Finishing Game Pass games before they go.
Currently playing: *Banishers: Ghosts of New Eden*
Favourite game of all time: *God Hand*

NICK THORPE

I think it might well be *WWF No Mercy.* It's a brilliant wrestling game either solo or with friends, and it takes me right back to the start of my wrestling fandom. Shame about that save bug, though.
Expertise: Owning five Master Systems and a Mark III
Currently playing: *Evil Egg*
Favourite game of all time: *Sonic The Hedgehog*

ANDY SALTER

While working in Exeter on various PlayStation tips magazine our lunchtimes often consisted of four-player *Mario Tennis 64.* It's brilliant fun.
Expertise: Modding games, no 'vanilla' versions for me, thanks!
Currently modding: *RTR: Imperium Surrectum*
Favourite game of all time: *Rome: Total War* although I guess it's the *Remastered* edition now

PAUL ROSE

Avoiding all of the usual suspects, I've a soft spot for Rare's *Blast Corps.*
Expertise: Winging it
Currently playing: *Baldur's Gate 3*
Favourite game of all time: *Half-Life 2*

GRAEME MASON

The reason I bought an N64 – *GoldenEye 007.* A magnificent recreation of my favourite *Bond* movie.
Expertise: Adjusting the tape azimuth with a screwdriver
Currently playing: *Saborus*
Favourite game of all time: *Resident Evil 4*

ANDREW FISHER

Paper Mario, for its brilliant presentation and clever mix of RPG and action elements.
Expertise: Forty years of gaming, from Commodore 64 to Switch
Currently playing: *Sherwood*
Favourite game of all time: *Wizball*

ADAM BARNES

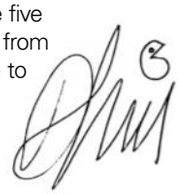
Purely for the nostalgic memory it gives me, I'd say *Space Station: Silicon Valley.*
Expertise: Being pretentious about coffee
Currently playing: *Abiotic Factor*
Favourite game of all time: *Baldur's Gate*

LOADING...

There are a lot of reasons why I love *Metroid Prime,* and it's not just because a quote from my Gamestyle review was used during its TV campaign. I loved how it placed you fully in the boots (and Varia Suit) of Samus Arun, how its scanning system cleverly added depth and expanded the game's plot and the many wondrous locations the game was set in – witnessing the Phendrana Drifts for the first time was just as impactful for me as stepping onto Hyrule Field in *Ocarina Of Time.* Perhaps the biggest impact *Metroid Prime* had was just how well it navigated the transition from 2D to the third dimension. It's a delight then, to not only quiz key staff members about the original *Metroid Prime*, but the later games in the series as well.

Outside of our excellent *Metroid Prime* coverage, you'll find plenty of great features, from an in-depth look at the games of Domark with cofounder Dominic Wheatley, to the creation of *Earthworm Jim 2.* We uncover numerous games that were cancelled by Enigma Variations and chat to Dan Curley about his varied magazine career. We've two Ultimate Guides covering *Alien Syndrome* and *QuackShot Starring Donald Duck*, there's a feature on the Nintendo 64's many great games and we review the five latest Evercade cartridges from Blaze. There's plenty more to discover, but I'll let you do that for yourself.

Stay safe and enjoy the magazine.



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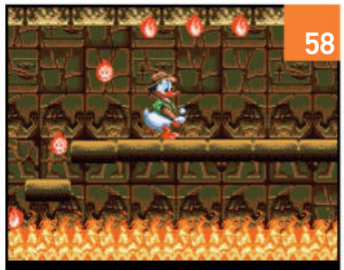

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A Tribute To: Domark

Dominic Wheatley looks back at his impressive publishing career

REBECCA HEINEMAN: AN ENDURING LEGACY

Veterans pay tribute to the gaming legend that cofounded Interplay

» [Atari 2600] Avalon Hill's *London Blitz* highlighted Rebecca's coding proficiency.

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Love wallowing in 2009 nostalgia? You've come to the right place

» Rebecca 'Burger' Heineman is an instrumental figure within the games industry. Her nickname comes from her habit of snacking on burgers when she was coding.

One of the early pioneers of the videogame industry recently passed away after a battle with cancer. Rebecca 'Burger' Heineman started a Go Fund Me campaign in early October when it became obvious that her insurance would not cover the full costs required to battle the aggressive form of cancer she was diagnosed with. "This is the fight for my life. Please help me. I want to keep creating games and comics and I need your support to beat this cancer," she posted.

Sadly, despite a swell of support, Rebecca soon learned that the cancer was progressing faster than anticipated. "It's time," she posted on 16 November. "According to my doctors. All further treatments are pointless. So, please donate so my kids can create a funeral worthy of my keyboard, Pixelbreaker! So I can make a worthy entrance for reuniting with my one true love, Jennell Jaquays." Rebecca passed away on 17 November, leaving behind an impressive legacy.

Rebecca's videogame journey began back in the Eighties when she entered and won a 1980 *Space Invaders* national competition in New York. She was soon offered a job writing for *Electronic Games* and then found herself working for Avalon Hill at the age of 16, after the studio discovered she had reverse-engineered an Atari 2600. Rebecca then worked at Boone Corporation, creating games like *Chuck Norris Superkicks*. When Boone dissolved, she teamed up with Brain Fargo, Troy Worrell and Jay Patel to form Interplay Productions, where she programmed the likes of *Wasteland*, *The Bard's Tale* and the Mac and 3DO ports of *Wolfenstein 3D*.

"Rebecca Heineman's passing is a great loss for the game industry," posted EA founder Trip Hawkins on Linkedin. "She was a force at Interplay, especially on one of my favourite game franchises from early EA, *The Bard's Tale*." Brian Fargo also paid tribute to Rebecca, posting the following on X. "Rebecca Heineman sadly passed away. Known her since the Eighties when I'd drive her to work, one of the most brilliant programmers around. A real gut punch earlier today when she messaged me, 'We have gone on so many adventures together! But, into the great unknown! I go first!!!'"

Rebecca worked on numerous games during her career, often working on impossible ports. One such example was *Doom* for the 3DO, which was incredibly challenging. Despite being told the game was 90% complete, she soon realised that wasn't the case. The full story can be found at bit.ly/rebecca_doom_3do and it's a fascinating tale.

Tom Hall, one of the original members of the *Doom* team paid his respects to Rebecca on Facebook, sharing, "RIP 'Burger' Becky Heineman. So many great games and ports. For me, especially the original *Bard's Tale*."

» [VIC-20] *Chuck Norris Super Kicks* was one of the first games Rebecca worked on.

» [C64] *Dragon World* was an early impressive RPG from Rebecca.

» The last entry in the *Sailor Ranko* series was in April 2023, with Rebecca later posting the series would be on hold due to her wife passing away.

» [3DO] *Doom* was a ridiculously ambitious port to the 3DO, but Rebecca managed to pull it off (despite plenty of behind-the-scenes struggles).

» [3DO] Rebecca ported *Another World* to numerous systems, including the SNES and 3DO.

In 1999, Rebecca founded Contraband Entertainment, which found success porting iconic games to the Mac such as *Baldur's Gate II* and *Aliens Vs Predator*, she also performed consultancy work for a range of companies, including Electronic Arts, Amazon, Ubisoft, Microsoft and Sony, where she was involved with consoles such as the Xbox 360 and PSP. After Contraband, Rebecca cofounded Old Sküül with Jennell Jaquays (her wife and an acclaimed artist within the videogame and boardgame community), Susan Manley and Maurine Starkey. In addition to acting as CEO, Rebecca continued to program, with *Battle Chess: Game Of Kings* being one of her final games.

In addition to programming, Rebecca was also involved with the *Sailor Ranko* series, which was based on the fanfiction novel of the same name by Duncan Zillman. Based on *Sailor Moon* and *Ranma ½*, Rebecca has written several later instalments and also worked on the popular webcomic, which ran until 2023. In addition to winning Gayming's Icon award at the 2025 Gayming Awards, she was a huge advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ community, serving as a member of GLAAD the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and was the Transgender Chair of Amazon's Glamazon.

> "Rebecca Heineman's passing is a great loss for the game industry"
> TRIP HAWKINS

Support has been immense for such a trailblazing figure. The Gayming Foundation called her, "An icon in every sense of the word," in its own obituary, while Nightdive Studios also shared support for her. "The Nightdive team is saddened by the loss of friend and industry legend, Rebecca Heineman. Her career spanned decades and impacted millions, with over 60 game credits to her name, including *Baldur's Gate* and *Bard's Tale III*."

Double Fine's Tim Schafer also shared his respects, posting on Bluesky, "RIP to a games industry pioneer and legend, Rebecca Heineman. If you're unfamiliar, look her up. Her career is like the story of videogames itself." Seamus Blackley shared his own support, posting, "Hey everybody who ever loved a videogame: take a moment right now and say a little prayer for Rebecca, to whom you owe much."

Rebecca herself was able to muse about her situation, posting on Bluesky, "I never thought I'd get this wish. Odd seeing eulogies before I expire," while her last message was a tribute to her wife Jennell Jaquays, "The last toast by the legend herself: I leave it up to you to go to lindken.com [sic] and look up Jennell Jacques [sic], now look at her job description, goddess of technology… and fuck cancer, fuck it in the ass."

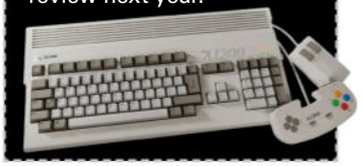
Our thoughts go out to Rebecca's friends and family during this difficult time. If you want to show your support you can still donate at Rebecca's Go Fund Me Page (bit.ly/rebecca_fund).

FULL STEAM AHEAD

Valve recently announced three new hardware products. The Steam Controller promises to be an update of its original 2015 controller, while the Steam Frame is Valve's new crack at VR. The most interesting to us is the Steam Machine which is Valve's second attempt to crack the console market. After the fun we've had playing retro games on the Steam Deck we're very much looking forward to the Steam Machine. All three items launch in 2026.

THE AMIGA 1200 RETURNS

Preorders are now open for The A1200, the latest device from Retro Games Ltd. Based on the Amiga 1200, the device comes with 25 built-in games, including the *Turrican* trilogy, *Ruff 'N Tumble* and *The Settlers II*. It will also have a full-size keyboard, HDMI output and the ability to play games from USB. It's expected to launch in June 2026 and costs £169.99. Needless to say, you can expect a review next year.



Who is Mike Mika?
Mike Mika's official videogame career began in the Nineties, working on Game Boy Color titles like *Klax* and *Alice In Wonderland*. He's now the studio head of Digital Eclipse, a studio acclaimed for its reverential treatment of classic games.

It's-a me, Pauline!

My daughter turned 16 this year, which means I've officially entered the stage of parenthood where anything I say is answered with eye-rolling. It also means I've been thinking a lot about when she was small – specifically the time she inadvertently sent me on one of the strangest, most meaningful missions of my life.

Back then, I was still nurturing the fantasy that my kids would one day wander over and ask to play a game with me, seeking secret apprenticeship in the art of ancient videogames. My son technically fulfilled this dream once, joining me for a round of *Combat* on the Atari 2600 after considerable bribery. I told myself it was a generational moment. In truth, it lasted maybe three minutes. He drifted back to his toy trains.

But my daughter was built differently. At three, she treated games with the same wide-eyed devotion I'd had as a kid. When I played Ron Gilbert's *The Cave*, she'd sit beside me, pointing at the screen and issuing commands. And her favourite? Our shared game, the one that still burns in my memory: *Donkey Kong*.

Her early wiring began without me noticing. Whether I was playing a game or watching *The King Of Kong*, she'd sit nearby with her toys, absorbing everything in passing glances. I'd just bought a *Donkey Kong* arcade cabinet, and before long it became our nightly ritual. She wasn't good yet, but she was relentless – playing until frustration boiled over, then asking me to take over.

Then came the moment. One evening she frowned at the screen and asked the question that changed everything, "Can I play the girl?"

It made perfect sense. We'd just played *Super Mario Bros 2*, where she always chose Princess Peach. Why wouldn't *Donkey Kong* offer the same? When I explained it wasn't possible, I watched disappointment wash over her. But her question stuck. I was a game developer. I had the tools. Why couldn't she play as the girl?

So I decided to tackle the NES version. A friend pointed me to Tile Layer Pro, a tool to edit NES ROMs. Suddenly I was knee-deep in sprite data. Mario was two tiles tall; Pauline was three. That meant rebuilding her from scratch, squeezing her into Mario's proportions. Each frame was trial and error – change, compile, test, repeat. By sunrise I'd rebuilt her animation and replaced Mario's 'M' with Pauline's 'P'. By breakfast, it all – miraculously – worked. That morning, when she climbed into my lap, I started the game. Pauline appeared. Her eyes went wide.

And here's the part I love: to her, it wasn't surprising at all. It just felt right – how the world should work, not a special exception. She played with a new kind of joy, and I witnessed first-hand the power of representation.

A friend posted the hack online and the story behind it, and it went viral – front page of Reddit, debates about gender roles, absolute chaos. Some people cheered. Some lost their minds. One person even wished my daughter dead, because apparently nothing threatens fragile masculinity like a toddler wanting Pauline to rescue Mario. She never knew about any of that. Thankfully.

Thirteen years later, she barely remembers it. But I do. And now that she's older – confident, independent, entirely herself – I see that moment for what it was: the first time she saw that if the world doesn't fit you, you don't have to wait for it to change. You can change it yourself. *

> "Back then, I was still nurturing the fantasy that my kids would one day wander over and ask to play a game with me"

Do you agree with Mike's thoughts? Contact us at:

RetroGamerUK | retrogamermag.bsky.social | @RetroGamer_Mag | retrogamer@futurenet.com

» The Vectrex Mini has recently been impressing players at events including the Portland Retro Gaming Expo and Crash Live.

GOAL SMASHED

THE VECTREX MINI CRUSHES ITS KICKSTARTER TARGET

In issue 278 of the magazine we spoke to David Oghia about his Vectrex Mini project, which was on its way to Kickstarter. The massively ambitious device has been a huge success and absolutely obliterated its target goal of £97,037. As we went to press the device has been supported by over 4,556 backers and has achieved an eye-watering £807,802.

First shown off at Gamescom, the Vectrex Mini plans to emulate the coolness of the distinctive console and comes with 12 built-in games and doubles up as a clock when it's not in use. The included games range from *MineStorm II* and *Spike*, to *Hyperchase* and *Cosmic Chasm* and will also allow you to play homebrew games via an SD card.

While David wasn't sure in our interview if the device would still come with an AMOLED screen, we're hoping that the massive success of the project will now make this more likely as we'd imagine it will help towards emulating the console's unique vector-based display.

The Vectrex Mini is currently planned to start shipping in September 2026. Needless to say, we'll be looking at reviewing this cool-looking device once it's finally released.

SPECIAL SPECTRUM

RETRO GAMES LIMITED UNVEILS A LIMITED BUNDLE

» The Collector's Edition package also includes a spiral-bound manual and a special edition of *Crash*.

We really enjoyed last year's 8-bit revival project The Spectrum, saying that it "should please any fan of the original machine looking for a quick and authentic way to revisit some 8-bit favourites" when we reviewed it in issue 268. Now, Retro Games Limited and Plaion Replai have announced a limited edition version of the plug-and-play system.

This special release is coloured white, as a tribute to the white ZX Spectrum produced to celebrate the production of a million of the iconic computers. Like the standard edition, it emulates 16K, 48K and 128K models and will include 48 built-in games including *Manic Miner*, *Head Over Heels* and *The Hobbit*. Beyond the new casing colour, the system is bundled with The Quickshot II, a USB joystick, The Printer, a thermal printer and The Microdrive, a USB memory stick including the program Fusion Paint. The Spectrum Collector's Edition is available for preorder now via plaionreplai.com, priced at £199.99 and set for release on 26 June 2026. The system will not be made available anywhere else, and though production numbers haven't been revealed, the companies have stressed that "Once the allocation is gone, it's gone forever."

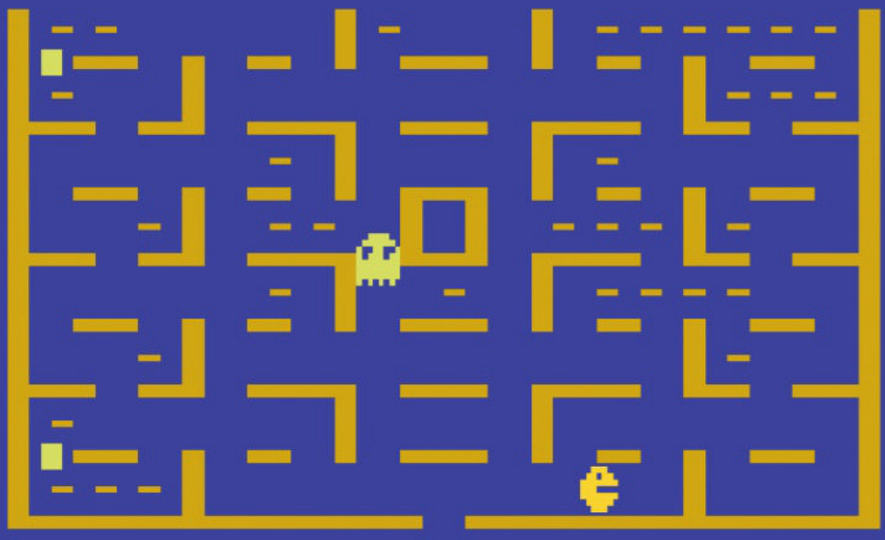
A FOUNDRY PODCAST

Our favourite part of Digital Foundry has always been its retro-focussed episodes. Since going independent, it now has a dedicated retro podcast. The DF Retro Super Show recently debuted and focussed on the launch of the PS2 with cast members John Linneman, Audi Sorlie, Coury Carlson and Marc Duddleson. You can catch up with the episode by heading to youtube.com/watch?v=DqtLH0MOkgI

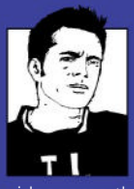
FORMAT AT 40

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Amiga and *Amiga Addict*'s 40th issue, the team has worked with Future Publishing to produce a one-off revival of *Amiga Format*. The issue includes contributions from launch editor Bob Wade, as well as past staff including Marcus Dyson, Andy Nuttall, Maff Evans, Sue White and Ben Vost. Grab a copy from amiga-addict.com

Who is Iain Lee?
Iain Lee is a freelance counsellor who loves gaming, particularly retro gaming. You can get more information about Iain by visiting iainleecounselling.com or heading over to patreon.com/iainandKatherine



Pac-Man VCS rulez!



I will have said this a million times before, but it is worth repeating – *Pac-Man* is the greatest videogame of all time. No buttons, just one stick. You can play for an hour or just have one round. It's obvious what to do, no instructions required. It's the first videogame that is pure art.

There was a lot of hullaballoo around the 45th anniversary of *Pac-Man* recently. I get a little lost with all these birthdays so I'm not 100% sure what it was. [Maybe the release of the *Pac-Man*-themed Atari 2600+? – Ed] And during that time, the oft-repeated line that the game as it was initially released on the VCS was rubbish was spouted by a load of old men. I've bought that narrative for quite a while as I am a very lazy person who prefers to be told what to think rather than actually do some thinking for myself. Because when I think for myself, I tend to get on my nerves and disagree with the received narrative and that is exhausting. But no more, I have to speak out.

Pac-Man on the VCS, Atari 2600, whatever you want to call it, was a brilliant game. It was as fun, if not more so than the arcade. The sound was superb and it played fantastically. Just perfect.

Why am I saying this? Because we knew no different. We might have played the arcade cab a few times but that would have been it. It was possible we had a few pictures of the OG gameplay in magazines, but we couldn't do side by side comparisons. So, in my nine-year-old head this WAS *Pac-Man*. This was the game. This is what the creators originally intended.

How could it be more fun than the arcade I hear you cry? Because it was in our actual homes. Well, not mine, I didn't have a VCS, but my mate did. And when I went round there, it was *Pac-Man* we went to first. I must stress – I was nine years old, and we had never seen anything like this in our lives. It was the equivalent of having the arcade in your home. It was pure magic.

I could not give a hoot that Atari rushed it out or made too many carts or any of that stuff. Irrelevant to the child sat on his knees on the floor playing this masterpiece on the big television IN COLOUR!

May I take a punt here dear reader? There are more than a few of you who think the same. I don't want to get all conspiracy theory here, but dig down deep in your grizzled minds. Do you agree? Do you actually believe the VCS version was a good game? Sure, you put them side by side there is a world of difference, but many of us were blind to that difference back in the day. It's OK to say you liked this version of the game. Don't be a revisionist. Be loud and be very proud.

By the way – as a 52-year-old man, playing on my knees is never happening again. Ouch. *

> "Pac-Man on the VCS, Atari 2600, whatever you want to call it, was a brilliant game. It was as fun, if not more so than the arcade"

Do you agree with Iain's thoughts? Contact us at:

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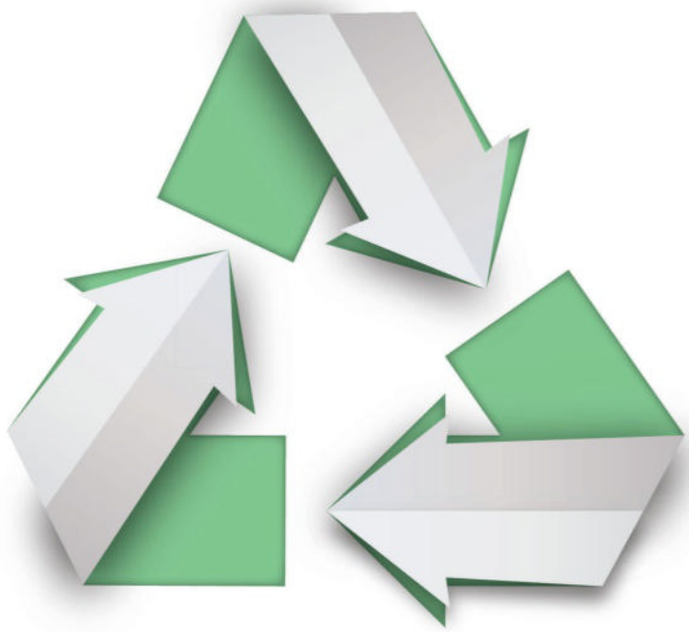

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Who is Paul Rose?
Paul is probably better known as Mr Biffo – the creator of legendary teletext games magazine *Digitiser*. These days, he mostly writes his videogame ramblings over at Digitiser2000.com. If you want more Biffo in your eyes, you can catch him as the host of *Digitizer The Show* at www.bit.ly/biffo2000.

Utterly consumed

It has been a long time since I've had to force myself to stop playing a game, but recently I've been horribly addicted to *Baldur's Gate 3*. You'll no doubt be aware of the reviews, but I'm not sure any game in recent memory has hooked me in quite the same way. Honestly, I started to get depressed at how I couldn't stop playing. I felt like a blob – a horrible waste of humanity. I'm sort of over it now. At least for the time being.

It's a testament to just how immersive and all-consuming a really, really good game can be, but also – probably – a reflection of my own tendency towards hyper focus.

That said, when I think back to other games that have consumed me so utterly, the list isn't as long as I thought. Sure, there haven't been many games that can compete with *Baldur's Gate 3*'s expansive freedoms, but there have been plenty that dominated my thoughts until I'd finished them.

Half-Life 2 is the one that springs immediately to mind. It's probably – if push came to shove – my favourite game of all time, so that's a no-brainer. Yes, it's far more linear than *Baldur's Gate 3*, but it created the sense that it existed in an infinite world. It hid its boundaries remarkably well. I think this is something that most of my favourite games have in common. If you go way, way back to something like *System Shock 2*, I genuinely believed in that universe. I wanted to learn more; I enjoyed spending time in it – living in it. And, like *Baldur's Gate*, it completely took over my life.

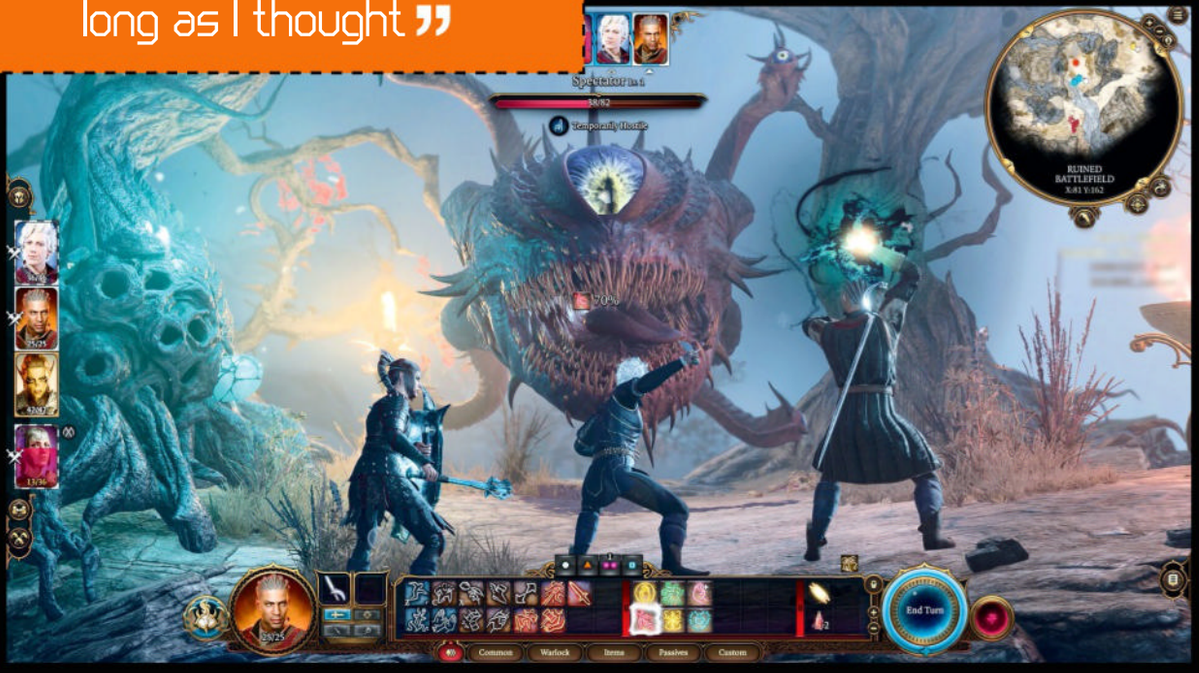
Weirdly, despite some of them being among my favourite games – and *A Link To The Past* certainly dominated every waking hour until I finished it – I've never felt the *Zelda* series was particularly immersive. I think they're too idiosyncratic, too singularly strange, to register as 'real places' to whatever part of my brain designates things as real.

And yet, I would say that *Super Mario 64* did feel immersive, despite being set in a universe that literally made zero sense. Maybe because it was somehow internally consistent with its own laws? I don't know. I don't make the rules. This is more a feeling than anything else.

Early games that tried to simulate reality – like *Shenmue* – never worked for me, because I felt their game mechanics too acutely, or could almost see the limitations of their worlds straining behind the walls. Whereas *Revenge Of Shinobi* – about as linear and 'videogame-like' an experience as it's possible to get – was utterly immersive.

Like I say, there's no real logic to this. It's why, in a way, it's hard to find consensus between people about their favourite games. We're all wired differently. For me, I love to be immersed in a place, transported somewhere, and I can't always predict which games are going to do that.

> "When I think back to other games that have consumed me so utterly, the list isn't as long as I thought"



Do you agree with Paul's thoughts? Contact us at:

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» Jim Drew's keycaps and Sean Donohue's case design complete this modern C64.

Commodore International

Commodore CEO Christian 'Perifractic' Simpson is leading the brand's revival at commodore.net

Words by Andrew Fisher

The Commodore brand has changed hands multiple times since its bankruptcy in 1994, but now Christian 'Perifractic' Simpson, best known for his YouTube channel Retro Recipes, has led a group effort to take control and to create new Commodore computers.

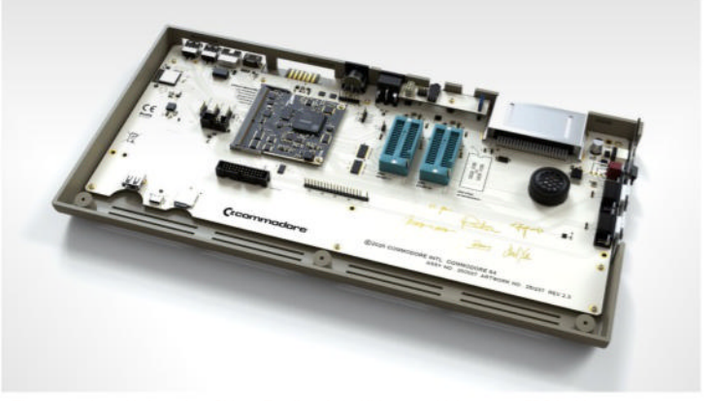
How did the takeover of Commodore copyrights happen, Christian?

It grew from a simple goal: do things the right way. After years of seeing the brand handled in ways that didn't reflect its legacy (fancy a Commodore Shredder anyone?), it actually began with a YouTube video. I reviewed the Commodore 64X Linux PC, conceived by Leo Nigro in 2010 at licensee Commodore USA, and which had just been brought back to life by Sean Donohue at Retro Games Ltd. Sean had licensed the Commodore name from the one-and-only owners of the original brand, Commodore Corporation BV.

What happened next?

So I released the video, it got over a million views, meaning Commodore was quite happy with us. That led to a conversation… which led to a licence… which led to a wildly successful launch… I had originally just pitched that we sign an exclusive license. To my surprise, they not only said yes, but suggested we know Commodore better than they do and might like to buy the whole thing. Turns out being a lifelong fan can be a valid business plan! And then the hard work began, not least of which was my real business plan and pitch deck – one that I was honoured to see investors flock to support. It's been a roller-coaster ever since.

> "I call our ethos Retro Futurism, and I'm building Commodore on those two solid pillars. Nostalgia and Nextgen"
>
> **CHRISTIAN 'PERIFRACTIC' SIMPSON**



» The motherboard is based on Gideon Zweijtzer's 64 Ultimate, which uses an FPGA chip.

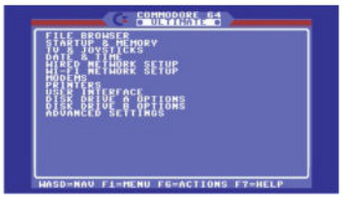
Was it important to get former Commodore figures involved?

Absolutely. Commodore has always been powered by its people. Bringing in original figures and long-time enthusiasts isn't nostalgia for its own sake. It's about grounding the revival in real experience and ensuring the next chapter reflects the values that made Commodore special in the first place. For example, at my request, Amiga legend Dave Haynie recently partnered with our motherboard designer Gideon Zweijtzer to solve an HDMI conundrum, and I spoke to Amiga Workbench Intuition creator RJ Mical again as recently as a few hours ago about a brand-new project. And equally important are today's creators and makers. We need to keep the ship sailing ahead without just looking back. I call our ethos Retro Futurism, and I'm building Commodore on those two solid pillars. Nostalgia and Nextgen. It's the only way Commodore can survive and continue to span generations. We're working on products that my two-year-old daughter will want to use in the future.

What are the key features of the new models available?

Each Commodore 64 Ultimate available at commodore.net blends

» Christian 'Perifractic' Simpson is passionate about retro gaming – when he's not working as an actor and voice-over artist.



» Switching on the Commodore 64 Ultimate gives you this menu, including a file browser.

» An HDMI output, SD card storage, and Wi-Fi features are included on all models, including the Founder's Edition.

authentic hardware level behaviour (it's not an emulator) with modern convenience and some fun visual eye candy: the 'instant on' you remember, rock-solid timing, HDMI output, 8 SID chips replicated onboard, spaces for real SID chips, Wi-Fi tools, modem emulation and full compatibility with dusty old classic cartridges and peripherals. I'll mention one new feature: CommoServe™ File Search lets you search online for games, download them and run them, all with a couple of clicks from your Commodore 64.

What does that mean for readers?

It's the Commodore you remember, rebuilt as if it had never stopped evolving. I truly believe the Commodore 64 Ultimate range is what we (Commodore) would have rereleased today if we hadn't blipped out for a bit back in 1994. As of early November 2025, almost all the major components are already manufactured, tens of thousands of motherboards are produced and are being flashed as we speak, and final assembly is queued behind the final keyboard batches. Over 200 pallets arrived at our assembly plant! The team has been working at full tilt to keep things moving despite the wider industry turbulence of customs and compliance delays. We are right on track to ship the first units out in November, as originally estimated.

Will you be selling new software under the Commodore label?

We're in active discussions with several developers. There are extremely exciting partnerships already agreed, which I wish I could discuss more at this stage. The community will be blown away. And our focus is on titles that hit a high bar of quality before they earn the Commodore name. Think of it as our modern equivalent of the Nintendo Seal Of Approval.

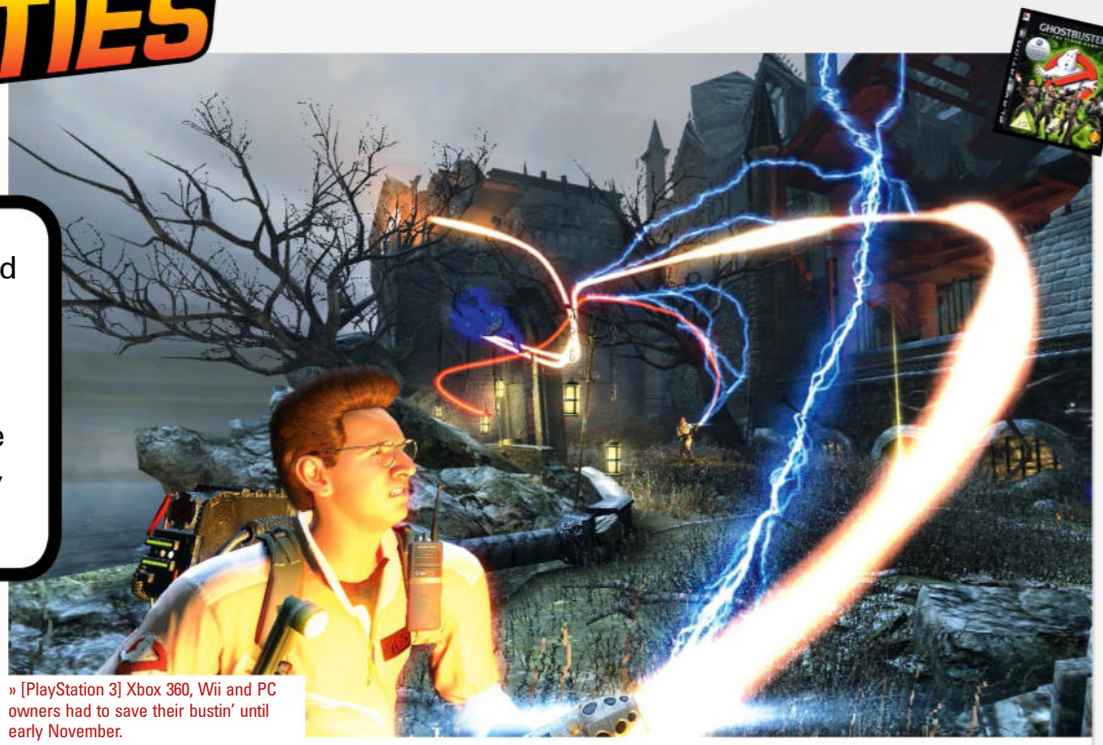
What are your plans regarding the Amiga?

I have said publicly that Amiga is – of course – on our radar. This means we'd absolutely welcome the opportunity, and if there's a path to a unified future for Commodore and Amiga, we'd love to help make that happen – but it has to be done right. And I will say this. We lead with respect, we deliver what we promise, and we've built the kind of momentum and a clear, long-term vision that makes a reunion viable rather than risky. Our approach puts heritage, stability, and community first. If Amiga ever merges or changes hands, I genuinely believe we're the safest and most mission-aligned custodians for its future. It feels only right that Amiga sails home, after all.

» The Starlight Edition case features LED lights that react to the SID chip sounds.

» Former Commodore people involved: (top) Bill Herd, Albert Charpentier, Dave Haynie, (bottom) Leonard Tramiel, David Pleasance, Colin Proudfoot.

BACK TO THE NOUGHTIES



» [PlayStation 3] Xbox 360, Wii and PC owners had to save their bustin' until early November.

JULY 2009 – Sound the sirens, it's a surprisingly solid slate of summer software, with superpowers, surly scrappers, social simulation and Slimer. Nick Thorpe stops his time machine to give you the details, and save his past self some cleaning fees

NEWS JULY 2009

On 16 July, Teletext Ltd announced its intentions to cease broadcasting on analogue and digital TV in January 2010, due to online competition and ongoing economic turmoil. The company was providing Teletext and interactive TV services for ITV, Channel 4 and Five, having taken over services on commercial channels from ORACLE in 1993. However, the Teletext Holidays service would continue to operate.

Two of the last surviving veterans of World War I passed away in July. Henry Allingham had been the last surviving airman and the world's oldest man when he died at 113 on 18 July, and he remains the longest-lived British man ever. Harry Patch, a British soldier and the last veteran of the trenches, passed one week later at 111 years old.

Bobby Robson passed away at the age of 76 on 31 July, following a long battle with lung cancer. Though he was able to represent England during his time as a football player, he was far better known for his managerial career. He led Ipswich Town to FA Cup and UEFA Cup victories, managed the England national team for eight years, and won domestic leagues and cups in Europe with PSV Eindhoven, Porto and Barcelona.

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JULY 2009

Mixed martial arts enthusiasts got a game for the ages from THQ and Yuke's, as *UFC Undisputed 2009* earned 90% from *Play* and 9/10 from *X360*, on top of 9/10 from *Official PlayStation Magazine* the previous month. "*Undisputed* catches the rise of the sport in a timely and accomplished fashion," said *games™* in an 8/10 review, praising the "remarkably technical" game for being "a far deeper fighting experience than anyone thought possible". *Official Xbox 360 Magazine* gave it 7/10, calling it "easily the best" MMA sim, but saying "the career mode could have been more imaginative than just a ranking ladder".

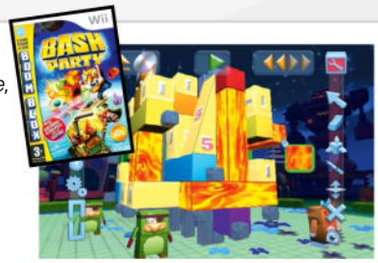
"Fundamentally, *The Sims 3* is still *The Sims*," said *PC Gamer*. "Although a significant improvement, wishes are just a small change from *The Sims 2*'s wants and fears. Traits are just a better version of the previous personality points. The roamable town feels essential, but it's mostly a technological leap." But being *The Sims* is a good thing to be, and worth a 90% score. "The production values, build quality and feature set here being almost overwhelming", said *Edge* in its 8/10 review. Add scores of 9/10 from *games™* and 8/10 from *Total PC Gaming*, and EA's latest clearly didn't disappoint.

The open-world action game *Infamous* arrived as a highly touted PlayStation 3 exclusive, and scored 9/10 in *OPM*'s exclusive review last month. Other publications weren't quite so impressed though. "At its best, *Infamous* is an amped-up *Crackdown*," said *Edge* in a 7/10 review. However, it complained of "ropey execution", a "bleak, ashen palette" and "truly wonky animation". Meanwhile, *games™* felt it "criminally unfinished" and also gave it 7/10. *Play* was more forgiving of the "unpolished" game, giving it 81% and saying that, "Sucker Punch clearly saw variety as its strong suit, thus the well of cool and exciting ideas never depletes entirely."

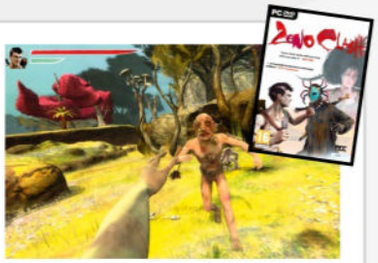
» [Xbox 360] The guy on the mat isn't intelligently defending himself – he's done for.

PS3 players also had first dibs on *Ghostbusters: The Video Game*, which arrived ahead of other versions in Europe. The game attracted an audience in *Play*'s office, and the way it captured the spirit of the movies resulted in "nostalgic grins spreading across pasty faces" and a score of 80%. *OPM* gave it 8/10, saying "finally, here's a big license with the game to back it up". *Edge* and *games™* each gave the game 7/10, with the former calling it a "great effort" in need of "a little more in the way of technical polish and a few more hours of playtime".

Red Faction: Guerrilla arrived nearly seven years after its predecessor, bringing back environmental destruction but adopting a new third-person perspective. After receiving 8/10 in *X360*'s exclusive review last month, the game got 8/10 from *OPM*, 80% from *Play* and 7/10 each from *games™* and *OXM*. "If you can get past the somewhat repetitive nature of *Red Faction: Guerrilla*'s gameplay then you'll find sheer pleasure in the demolition," said our own Tim Empey in *360*, giving it 4/5. *OXM* felt that it had "intriguing" design, but "hasn't been built to last" and had a "deeply uninteresting" story.



» [Wii] Sharing your creations was a big part of the *Boom Blox: Bash Party* experience.



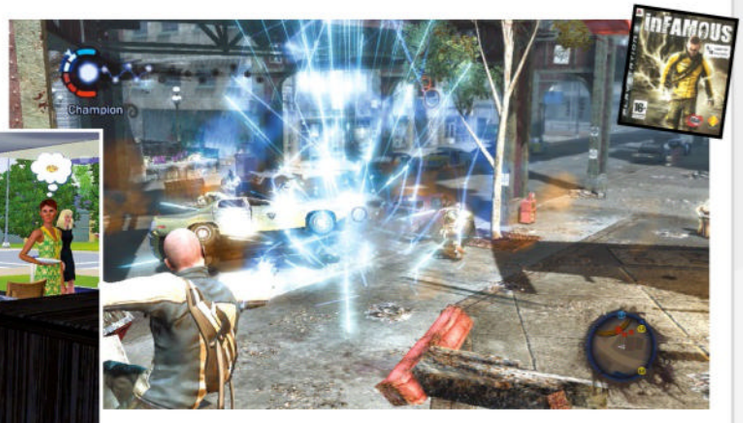
» [PC] To be fair, we'd be throwing fists if someone ran towards us wearing that little.

The Steven Spielberg-approved Wii exclusive puzzler *Boom Blox: Bash Party* was "*Boom Blox*, only even better" according to *Official Nintendo Magazine*, which gave it 92%. The magazine was particularly impressed with the new space and underwater environments, which "really mess with the physics in an interesting way". *Edge*'s 8/10 review highlighted how improved online sharing of custom levels created a "free buffet of finger-food gaming" though it cautioned that, "Those looking for an upped challenge to go with the increased scope are unlikely to find it." With *NGamer* also giving it 88% last month, EA's sequel had delighted the critics.

Finally, ACE Team offered up the intriguing PC exclusive *Zeno Clash* – a first-person beat-'em-up that scored 84% in *PC Gamer* and 8/10 in *Edge*, *games™* and *Total PC Gaming*. The game earned praise for multiple aspects from *Total PC Gaming*, which touted "simple but superbly executed bobbing, weaving and counters that turn what could have been a button-masher into a fairly tactical game", as well as "ceaselessly beguiling scenery and an unusually stirring score". *PC Gamer* found it to be, "A completely welcome contrast to anything you've ever played, with the best first-person fisticuffs in a game."

Join us again next month for a break-up, a team-up, a *Prototype* and more fist fights. ✱

» [PC] Does this guy need to feed a baby, or just want a bottle?



» [PlayStation 3] Let it be known, Cole MacGrath doesn't take kindly to minor traffic violations.

CHARTS

JULY 2009

XBOX 360

1 – **UFC Undisputed 2009** (THQ)
2 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
3 – **Call Of Duty 4: Modern Warfare** (Activision)
4 – **Battlestations Pacific** (Eidos)
5 – **The Godfather II** (EA)

PLAYSTATION 3

1 – **X-Men Origins: Wolverine** (Activision)
2 – **Killzone 2** (Sony)
3 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
4 – **Resident Evil 5** (Capcom)
5 – **Street Fighter IV** (Capcom)

PSP

1 – **FIFA 09** (EA)
2 – **Resistance: Retribution** (Sony)
3 – **Football Manager Handheld 2009** (Sega)
4 – **X-Men Origins: Wolverine** (Activision)
5 – **Ben 10: Alien Force** (D3 Publisher)

MUSIC

1 – **Evacuate The Dancefloor** (Cascada)
2 – **Bulletproof** (La Roux)
3 – **Man In The Mirror** (Michael Jackson)
4 – **Paparazzi** (Lady Gaga)
5 – **When Love Takes Over** (David Guetta ft. Kelly Rowland)

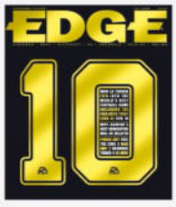
THIS MONTH IN...

Official PlayStation Magazine

A review describes an "Evil dungeon-crawler" available on import as an "unkind" and "abusive" game. Apparently *Demon's Souls* is difficult but also "a little bit special", scoring 8/10. We can't see it catching on.

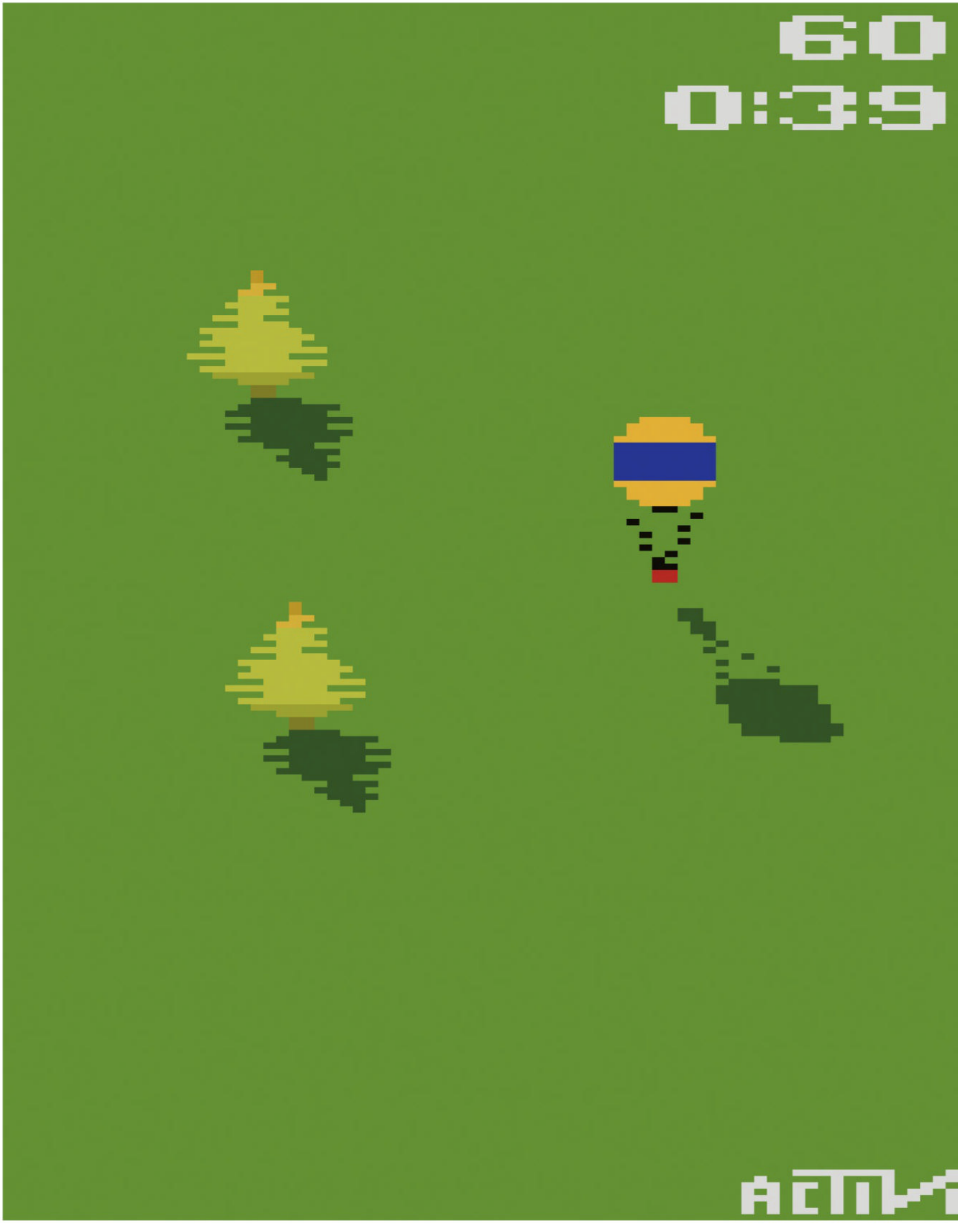
games™

Team17 has decided to pursue a digital-first, self-publishing strategy. "Developers and publishers are very different beasts and it was sometimes like a power struggle," says studio director Martyn Brown, explaining the choice.



Edge

It appears we'll be waiting until 2013 for next-gen consoles, but Wedbush Morgan analyst Michael Pachter doesn't see a problem. "Do [hardcore gamers] really care if *GTA V* plays on a new console or one they've already got?"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Sky Jinks

FLIGHTS I FANCY

» ATARI 2600 » 1982 » ACTIVISION

If you've been reading the magazine for any length of time, you'll know me to be something of a score chaser. When I first came across *Sky Jinks* on the excellent *Activision Anthology* for Sony's PlayStation 2, I erroneously believed it would be a shooter, similar to 2600 hits like *Plaque Attack* or *River Raid*. There may be a plane in Bob Whitehead's game, but its goal is to not shoot down objects, but to instead avoid them.

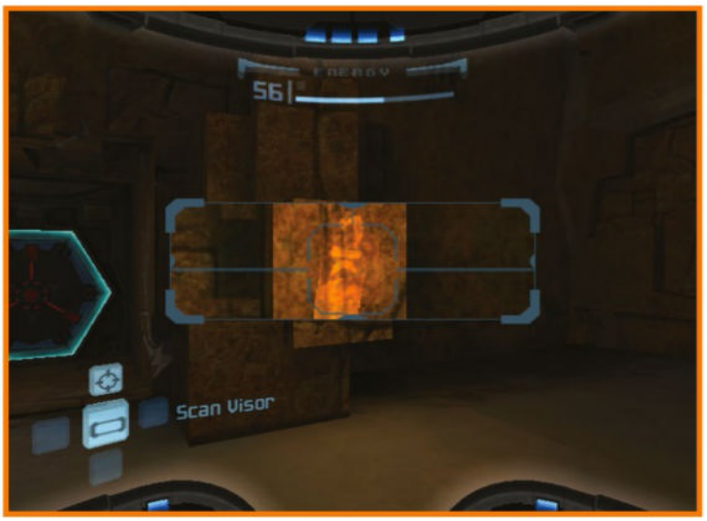
Essentially, *Sky Jinks* is a game of dexterity and skill and requires you to weave your plane, slalom-style, through a set number of blue and red pylons across several different levels. Your plane can bank left and right, while accelerating and decelerating is achieved by holding or depressing the fire button. In addition to the red and blue pylons, hazards appear in the form of strategically placed trees and hot air balloons that lazily drift across the screen. Hit any of them and you'll slow down.

Add in a time limit and you'll start to realise why I found myself returning to *Sky Jinks* time and time again whenever I booted up the compilation. I have an almost compulsive need to better any score I place in a game and I do something similar with time-focussed games as well. I spent hours and hours trying to shave precious seconds off my time in games like *Super Mario Kart*, and *Sky Jinks* proved to be just as compelling to me.

If I had owned an Atari 2600 back in the day I no doubt would have attempted to earn one of the coveted patches that Activision would award for getting high scores in its games, but alas, it was never to be. The recent release of *Activision Collection 1* on the Evercade has reignited my interest in Bob's game and I've once again found myself in that compelling gameplay loop all over again. ✱

THE EVOLUTION OF
METROID
PRIME

» [GameCube] Despite its 3D perspective, *Metroid Prime*'s platforming is just as intuitive as the 2D original's.



» [GameCube] As well as unlocking doors and activating systems, scanning objects in *Metroid Prime* reveals lore.

A FLAWLESS REIMAGINING OF NINTENDO'S 2D SERIES IN 3D, METROID PRIME WAS MET WITH UNANIMOUS ACCLAIM AND RECEIVED TWO POPULAR SEQUELS. PRIME TRILOGY CREATIVES JASON BEHR, KYNAN PEARSON AND VINCE JOLY EXPLAIN HOW THE SERIES EVOLVED

WORDS BY RORY MILNE

■ Jason Behr was lead level designer on the *Prime* series while at Retro. These days he's a cool housedad.

■ *Echoes* and *Corruption* level designer Kynan Pearson is now a creative director for the videogames industry.

After 16-bit gaming faded, there were many failed attempts to adapt popular sprite-based games into polygon-powered follow-ups. Some 2D concepts simply didn't work in 3D, while others were unsuccessfully translated by developers struggling to adapt to thinking in three dimensions. The developers of *Metroid Prime* avoided these and other pitfalls while transitioning their inspiration into 3D. This was all the more impressive given *Metroid*'s eclectic gameplay. Not only was the NES classic a non-linear adventure, but it also encompassed platforming and shoot-'em-up elements.

Level designer Jason Behr joined the *Prime* team at Retro Studios having previously worked under its project director Mark Pacini. Jason then took his lead from preliminary designs that had been produced by *Prime*'s senior designers. "I'd previously worked for Mark as a junior level designer at Acclaim Studios Austin. Afterwards, I heard about an open position on his new mystery project at Retro," Jason recalls. "By the time I joined, a rough high-level Metroidvania world and ability pick-up flow influenced by classic *Metroid* experiences had already been drafted. There had also been some paper planning and artwork for level ideas, which I modified and translated into three-dimensional, more vertically layered spaces for platforming. I also made sure that opportunities for classic side-scrolling Morph Ball sequences weren't overlooked."

But far from being simply an exercise in adapting 2D *Metroid* mechanics for a three-dimensional space, *Prime* was also intended to stand in its own right as an innovative and exciting exemplar of 3D gaming. Nevertheless, the cutting-edge design imagined for *Prime* continually drew inspiration from the mechanics established by its predecessors. "We had to figure out how to uniquely take advantage of the use of 3D and first-person in ways that hadn't been seen before, which was arguably the higher priority by way of it being the higher risk. *Prime* needed to establish its own identity," Jason notes. "But in the background, there were always team members faithfully exploring which parts of the *Metroid* franchise DNA could be preserved in spirit, and if so what adjustments would be necessary. We were all fans, after all."

■ SoftHare executive creative director Vince Joly was an animator on *Echoes* and *Corruption*'s lead animator.

> "ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT PUZZLES WAS RECONCILING SAMUS JUMPING WITH THE MECHANICAL LIMITATIONS OF FIRST-PERSON"
> JASON BEHR

One aspect of *Metroid*'s DNA that required considerable thought was the side-on adventure's platforming. More specifically, *Prime*'s designers needed to know how best to represent the boundless energy of its heroine Samus Aran when jumping from surface to surface in a way that felt natural and would be intuitively understood from a first-person perspective. "One of the most interesting development puzzles was reconciling Samus jumping with the mechanical limitations of first-person," Jason observes. "Since players couldn't see directly behind, above or below, or turn quickly without disorientation, we needed to think more about forward momentum. So while systems ▶

» [GameCube] *Metroid Prime* switches from a first-person viewpoint to a third-person one for Morph Ball sequences.

designers and engineers worked hard at perfecting the *feel* of Samus' powerful jumps, in level design we experimented with platform sizes, heights and distances relative to player ability, angles to sequential targets and visual contrast cues that put the mind more at ease."

A defining challenge of the 2D *Metroid* titles was rightly deemed unworkable when depicted through Samus' eyes, but that didn't mean that *Prime* couldn't pay homage to this recurring setpiece in a way that made sense in first-person. All that was needed was a power-up that made Samus' standard double-jump feel tame. "As you gained the Space Boots mid-game there were some really empowering sequences that had a sense of freedom and rhythm," Jason enthuses. "And while we couldn't directly translate the iconic platforming shafts of the 2D series we did achieve some pretty impressive vertical spaces by way of gently curving, rising jump sequences, like in the far corners of Phendrana Drifts."

The guiding principle underpinning both jumping and aiming weapons in *Prime* was ease of use, and so features like locking onto targets while retaining freedom of movement were incorporated. Aside from not wanting to make platforming a needlessly difficult afterthought – as first-person shooters often did, this approach would also better represent *Prime*'s highly skilled protagonist. "We had to take all that and hold it up to Nintendo's philosophy of accessibility; that games should not necessarily be easier to beat or complete, but easier to understand, inviting to try and satisfying to accomplish," Jason reasons. "When you combined that with stepping into Samus' persona as a character it didn't make sense that an athletic, seasoned bounty hunter would struggle to aim a weapon or jump. We needed players to immediately feel her confidence, not feel hesitation and clumsiness. We could find the challenge elsewhere."

Elements of this challenge came in the form of puzzles and strategic battles. These often required a special visor capable of scanning objects and enemies to reveal information, backstory and weaknesses. This visor also allowed players to activate machinery and systems. Two other visors could reveal otherwise invisible foes using X-rays and thermal imaging. "*Metroid Prime*'s visor system layered on fresh ways to search for information, provided variety in both puzzles and combat, and give new value to old areas being re-traversed at later stages," Jason assesses. "As a player, the ability to scan made me hungry to learn anything and everything I could about

> "BEING AN ADVENTURE GAVE US PERMISSION TO CRAFT MOMENTS OF AWE, WHERE DISCOVERY WAS A REWARD UNTO ITSELF"
> JASON BEHR

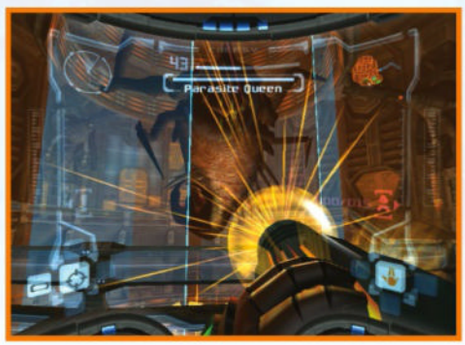
» [GameCube] First seen in *Super Metroid*, the Grapple Beam allows you to swing to otherwise inaccessible places.

» [GameCube] Corridors lined with laser-firing eyes called Eyons are typical of *Metroid Prime*'s physical challenges.

each environment, and to proactively unravel the story. It was also a great opt-in helper, rather than having an invasive pop-up when struggling with a puzzle or encounter."

This focus on problem solving and discovery was complemented by level designs created to encourage exploration; *Prime* had grander ambitions than to just be a mere first-person shooter. Like the *Metroid* games before it, *Prime* couldn't be easily categorised, and so based on its hybrid nature it was decided to call it a first-person adventure. "Part of what made any *Metroid* game special was understanding that players could be rewarded primarily for traversal, curiosity and perception, not just for combat," Jason points out. "I also think a first-person adventure begged the player to stop and enjoy the view. Levels were composed carefully to lead the player's eye while entering the space to provide choices and goals. Lastly, being an adventure gave us permission to craft moments of awe, where discovery was a reward unto itself in between the intensity of battles."

While trailblazing a new direction for the series led to some difficulties during development, including lengthy crunch time, the decision to make *Prime* a first-person adventure was validated on its release. It sold in its millions and received near-perfect reviews. Ultimately it became a best-selling GameCube title. This success led to the sequel *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes*, which gained its primary concept after some discussion, as *Echoes'* level designer Kynan Pearson



» [GameCube] The bosses in *Metroid Prime* can be tough to take down, even after scanning them for weaknesses.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: PRIME INSPIRATIONS (1986–2002)

METROID

The original works so well that it's little wonder the *Prime* titles retained so much of its gameplay. *Metroid* is a platformer/shoot-'em-up arcade adventure, with its main draw being exploration of non-linear levels to find power-ups that facilitate your progress.

SUPER METROID

In addition to giving the *Prime* series a more fully realised version of Samus' world to adapt than *Metroid* had, the 16-bit sequel also introduced features such as the Charge Beam, mini-map and Grappling Beam, all of which were incorporated into the *Prime* trilogy.

METROID FUSION

Technically a predecessor to *Metroid Prime* due to releasing earlier in most regions, *Fusion* unlocks features in *Prime* when a Game Boy Advance and GameCube running the games are linked. For example, after you've completed *Prime* you get access to Samus' Fusion suit.

» [GameCube] In *Echoes*, your foes are often possessed by a race from an alternate dimension called Dark Aether.

» [GameCube] Jumping into bomb slots in *Echoes* while in Morph Ball form allows you to activate machinery.

» [GameCube] Players are subtlety guided through *Echoes* by environmental features like this abandoned terminal.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION: PRIME SPIN-OFFS (2004-2006)

METROID PRIME: HUNTERS - FIRST HUNT

This DS pack-in title is a demo version of *Prime: Hunters*, which came out over a year later. Rather than featuring content from *Hunters*, *First Hunt* gives you single-player training missions and multiplayer deathmatches in three arenas that are unique to the demo.

METROID PRIME PINBALL

Although it doesn't reflect its inspiration's core gameplay, *Metroid Prime Pinball* takes Samus' Morph Ball form and has a lot of fun with it. Tables themed around *Prime* levels help the spin-off's authenticity, as do the likes of wall-jumping and roaming *Metroid* enemies.

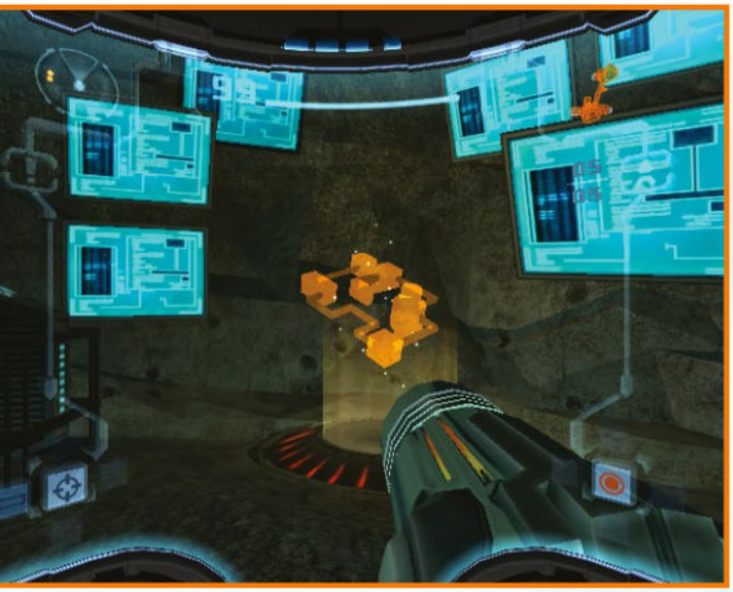
METROID PRIME: HUNTERS

More of an FPS than the core *Prime* games, *Hunters* nevertheless delivers a *Prime*-like experience on the DS. Its puzzles are simpler and its levels more linear than *Prime*, *Echoes* or *Corruption*, but it does introduce the concept of remotely controlling Samus' ship.

explains. "We had two separate premises, and we ended up on a dark world/light world one," Kynan reviews. "Tanabe-san from Nintendo had worked on *A Link To The Past*, so he had experience of working with those themes. But it was difficult in terms of world-planning to make everything make sense when we were dealing with two separate worlds. *Echoes*' structure having a central hub with three additional environments attached to it was a by-product of the complexity of going between portals linking dark and light worlds."

From a perspective of *Echoes*' narrative, its dark world was explained as an evil alternate version of a planet called Aether. Being as the two planes were essentially mirror images of each other they needed to look somewhat similar, but at the same time the malevolent iteration was required to provoke a sense of disquiet. "We needed the dark world to be familiar enough in juxtaposition to the light world, but then we also needed it to have a distinct look," Kynan qualifies. "We would create these effects that moved like earthworms that would scroll along surfaces and move in an uneasy way. We also changed the colour palette to lean more towards a higher saturation but also darker hues. Then there were light bubbles that added a unique quality to the look of the dark world."

On a higher level, the hub and three environments that underpinned *Echoes*' structure gave opportunities to differentiate different areas of the game from one another. This was applied to aesthetics, themes and mechanics, and as well as making stages of *Echoes* distinct, it provided contrast between it and its lighter, brighter predecessor. "We wanted variety, and going from an arid region to a waterlogged one was a significant theme change; it also afforded different gameplay opportunities," Kynan considers. "These settings felt alien and desolate because the environment themes were darker than those in *Prime*. That played up *Echoes*' light and dark worlds. We were desaturating the palette, so the variety between the Luminoth Temple, the sand lands and the bogs wasn't that visually significant, but it created a great contrast between them and the digital Sanctuary Fortress."



» [GameCube] Just being in Dark Aether drains your health, but you can replenish it by entering safe zones.

» [GameCube] In keeping with *Prime*, the bosses in *Echoes* often leave behind power-ups after they're beaten.

» [GameCube] Unlike *Prime*, *Echoes* has multiplayer modes: Deathmatch and the coin collection-based Bounty.

Another way that *Echoes* distinguished itself from *Prime* was by bringing back aspects of earlier *Metroid* titles such as Samus' deadly somersault move the Screw Attack and wall-jumping. *Echoes* also boasted a four-player local multiplayer mode, which *Prime* had lacked, although this split-screen offering had been intended to be full-screen and online. "Before we knew for sure that we were doing *Echoes* we worked on a multiplayer mode that was supposed to be online," Kynan confirms. "But as we discovered that there wouldn't be the ease of online that we wanted we started focussing on a four-player split-screen instead. At that point the multiplayer became a little more light-hearted, and we had to tone down the poly counts for the environments because they needed to be rendered in all four quarters of the screen."

> "SOMETIMES 'LESS IS MORE', AND THE LACK OF DIALOGUE STRENGTHENED THE SENSE OF ISOLATION AND MYSTERY"
> VINCE JOLY

In addition to *Echoes*' modes, the sequel was further enhanced by animated sequences that played out throughout the game with the intent of driving its narrative forward, setting the scene for important setpieces and enhancing its tone. They even gave visual clues for certain forthcoming challenges, as *Echoes'* animator Vince Joly recollects. "I was brought on as a contract animator near the completion of *Echoes* to help create the in-game cinematics," Vince reflects. "These complemented the exploration experience and often provided subtle clues to the player about how to approach puzzles or bosses. Sometimes 'less is more', and the lack of dialogue strengthened the sense of isolation and mystery, which allowed the player to project their own thoughts onto their avatar Samus."

The response to *Echoes* was equal to that experienced by *Prime*, with both players and critics lauding its storytelling and light world/dark world dynamics, although the

multiplayer wasn't quite as well received. Its follow-up *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* had a point of difference without considering its design, simply because it was created to take advantage of the motion control-oriented Wii, as *Corruption* level designer Kynan Pearson remembers. "Mark Haigh-Hutchinson did a great job with the control scheme using the early prototypes that we had, and one of the key things was that being able to look wherever you wanted changed the camera control," Kynan remarks. "You could move at a natural pace and look around at the same time. We could also have tighter environments with sharper corners, and a lot more verticality where you could look at your pathing as you were discovering things that were out of the normal camera view."

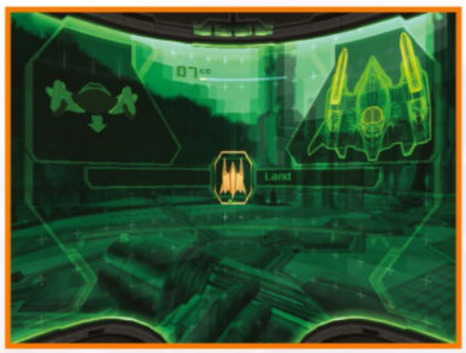
» [Wii] Like its predecessors, *Corruption* throws environmental hazards at you, including a collapsing bridge.

» [Wii] *Corruption*'s screen-high bosses take advantage of the verticality made possible by the Wii's controllers.

***Corruption* also stood out thanks to its new mechanics, and one of the most interesting of these was a power-up called Hypermode.** With potentially life-ending risk/reward dynamics, it dared players to spend Samus' health on becoming near invulnerable with powered-up weapons. Kynan describes Hypermode as being invaluable in the right hands. "We wanted a layer of flow, where players who were able to understand the system could take advantage of it," Kynan ponders. "It was interesting, because we were basically playing with the resource of health as a means of difficulty adjustment. So basically you were spending your health in order to make getting through a scenario easier. It was almost like you were gambling with the chances of finishing a level without taking more damage than the health you were going to otherwise spend on Hypermode."

Further distinction from its predecessors was achieved by *Corruption* giving Samus three different planets to travel between. Each world's look was imagined by different teams of artists, albeit with teams regularly monitoring each other's progress.

Aside from peer reviews, the visual design of one of the planets required a Herculean cross-discipline effort to realise. "It was more effort to create three planets instead of one, in terms of making sure each planet felt distinct and unique," Kynan acknowledges. "Brio had this central nature thing, but it also had fire sides and ice sides. So that was three themes in one



» [Wii] Visors first appeared in *Prime*, and *Corruption* has one that lets you remotely command Samus' ship.

world. Then Elysium was a completely unique, custom design that we were able to pull off based on a lot of work from design, engineering and art working together on it."

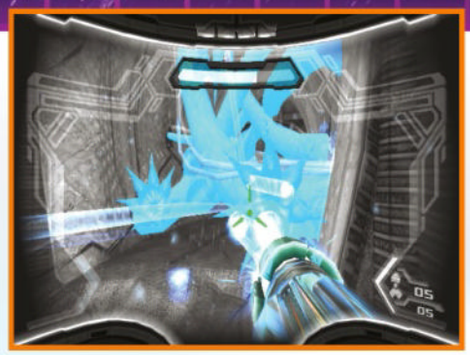
With Samus travelling between worlds, a greater focus was given to her gunship. But rather than just watching cinematics of it traversing space, like in the earlier games, *Corruption* let players interact with and remotely control it. Besides commanding it to land so that Samus could board, players could also instruct it to overcome challenges. "Everybody loved Samus' ship, but it really wasn't utilised all that much in the prior games, so using it to land on different planets was done to hold up its value," Kynan states. "Then having a command visor to call the ship in to lift heavy objects, do bombing runs and various other things felt like a cool evolution that still took advantage of the player seeing things through Samus' perspective the whole time."

The main exception to this first-person perspective was when Samus was in Morph Ball form, during which a third-person viewpoint was adopted. The only time Samus' human form was seen was in cinematics and as she was morphing. *Corruption*'s lead animator Vince Joly remembers getting advice on how Samus should move during these scenes. "We were always told that Samus was stoic, somewhat like Clint Eastwood in an old Western, so we adjusted her motions to slightly reflect that personality," Vince reveals. "Most of the movement set of animations were largely unseen due to the first-person camera; however, I do recall reworking the transitions in and out of the Morph Ball to make them look more natural and smooth, which helped the movement feel satisfying and responsive during gameplay."

> "HAVING A COMMAND VISOR TO CALL THE SHIP IN TO LIFT HEAVY OBJECTS, DO BOMBING RUNS AND VARIOUS OTHER THINGS FELT LIKE A COOL EVOLUTION"
> KYNAN PEARSON

Besides creating cinematics for *Corruption*, Vince's team was tasked with animating every creature, ▶

» [Wii] *Metroid* big bad Ridley attacks Samus in Morph Ball form in one of *Corruption*'s memorable encounters.



STAGES OF EVOLUTION: PRIME SPIN-OFFS (2009-2016)

METROID PRIME: TRILOGY

Far from a mere compilation, *Trilogy* boasts visually superior Wii versions of *Prime* and *Echoes* with motion-control support. The Wii original *Corruption* completes the package. In Japan, standalone Wii versions of *Prime* and *Echoes* were released in place of *Trilogy*.

METROID PRIME: BLAST BALL

Pre-dating the game that it would subsequently appear as part of by a year, *Blast Ball* is a version of soccer played by Galactic Federation marines in mech suits. The *Federation Force* precursor limits its chaos by restricting matches to three mechs against three.

METROID PRIME: FEDERATION FORCE

Something of a spiritual successor to *Hunters*, except *Federation Force* pares back the core gameplay of the *Prime* titles further with its omission of scanning for lore and to activate systems. This makes it even more of an FPS, albeit one where exploration is key.

STAGES OF EVOLUTION:
PRIME SUCCESSORS
(2010–2021)

METROID: OTHER M

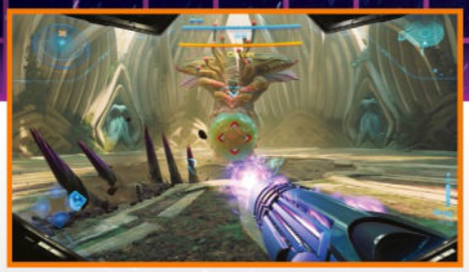
Other M differentiates itself by having both third and first-person perspectives. Platforming, exploration and arm cannon firefights play out in third-person, whereas locking onto targets and firing missiles are first-person, and you can't move in this viewpoint.

METROID: SAMUS RETURNS

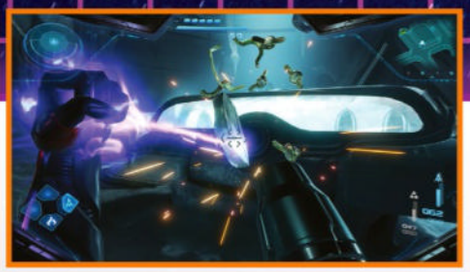
A 3DS remake of the Game Boy title *Metroid II*, *Samus Returns* features new visuals, additional areas to seek out and fresh mechanics. As well as being able to fire in all directions, Samus can gain access to weapons not seen in *Metroid II* such as the Grapple Beam.

METROID DREAD

Created for the Switch by the studio responsible for *Samus Returns*, *Dread* is 2D side-on like its predecessor. It innovates with its introduction of stealth tactics, which include using a Phantom Cloak that makes Samus invisible at the cost of reducing her speed.



» [Switch 2] Just like in the original three *Metroid Prime* games, the bosses in *Beyond* are weird and wonderful.



» [Switch 2] The Grappling Beam is back in *Beyond*, and it allows you to retrieve out-of-reach collectables.

» [Switch 2] One look at a hostile encounter in *Beyond* demonstrates that it has the *Prime* trilogy in its DNA.

opponent and boss that the follow-up threw at Samus. They also produced animations for her outstretched arm cannon, the hand on her other arm when she used it to lock-on to targets and her interactions with her gunship's onboard controls. "Our team was responsible for all in-game as well as cinematic animation for *Corruption*; there were seven animators in total," Vince details. "We were responsible for rigging and animating all the characters in *Corruption*, including Samus. For instance, the twitchy Space Pirate idle animation was one that I did. The biggest challenge was maintaining the high-quality animation we aimed for within a tight production timeline."

The high quality of *Corruption* was noted in critiques that cited it as the best *Prime* title, and its sales reflected this accolade. When reviewing the *Prime* games, *Echoes* and *Corruption* level designer Kynan Pearson feels the trilogy gave players experiences that are no longer offered, although he sees the recently released *Metroid Prime 4: Beyond* changing that. "They were a very unique set of games that were built based on the time period that they existed in, and it's almost like you can't get games like them anymore. So I'm excited that *Metroid Prime* 4 is coming. It's nice to have *Prime* back in people's thoughts again."

The lead level designer on all three *Prime* titles Jason Behr is similarly positive about *Beyond*, and he's certain it will honour the series that it's continuing. "I'm very excited for *Metroid Prime* 4, especially for the

» [Switch 2] A new feature in *Beyond* allows you to activate systems using Samus' psychic abilities.

» [Switch 2] While *Beyond*'s Vi-0-La motorcycle intrigues us, Samus' new sidekick Myles MacKenzie is dividing the series' fanbase.

> "I'M VERY EXCITED FOR METROID PRIME 4, ESPECIALLY FOR THE FRESH GAMEPLAY OPPORTUNITIES, AS RETRO WILL UNDOUBTEDLY HAVE BEEN ASKED TO EVOLVE THE MECHANICS"
> JASON BEHR

fresh gameplay opportunities, as Retro will undoubtedly have been asked to evolve the mechanics of the franchise while staying true to its identity," Jason offers. "Nintendo's got a great track record in rethinking old formulas and reinvigorating old ideas, and Retro did an outstanding job with the remaster, which was a pleasure to play. So I think they'll succeed in moving the *Prime* series forward again."

Asked for his thoughts on *Beyond, Echoes'* animator and *Corruption's* lead animator Vince Joly mentions his brief stint on the project and notes his interest in a particularly exciting aspect of the fourth *Prime* title. "I only worked on *Beyond* for a few months at the beginning of production, but I'm curious to see what players think of its new bike mechanic," Vince muses. "Personally, I don't have strong feelings about the game either way yet – it's still too early to tell. But for the sake of my old team at Retro Studios I genuinely hope it's a huge success."

Due to deadlines, we've not played *Beyond* yet, but the vast majority of what we have seen of it looks very promising. On the technical side, it runs at 120 frames per second on the Switch 2, and as well as twin-stick and motion controls it supports the use of the Joy-Con 2 as a mouse. Fresh gameplay is delivered by Samus' new motorcycle the Vi-0-La, which is used to explore the open-world planet Bryus. The Vi-0-La has boomerang-style homing-missiles that can lock-on to and dispatch multiple targets before returning. It also has a speed boost that when combined with power slides transforms the bike into an engine of destruction. Samus also gains psychic powers that let her operate ancient machines and bend the course of her shots.

At its core, *Beyond* is a faithful evolution of the original *Metroid Prime* titles. Given the last word on these, their lead level designer Jason Behr gives due credit to those who worked with him on the games and to the inspiration they all took from the *Metroid* games that came before *Prime*. "I look back and admire the amazingly talented group of more experienced people whose contributions I was ultimately dependent on," Jason reminisces. "Level design is so often the art of curating spaces that put the rest of the team's best work on display in the strongest arrangement possible. Whether it's reconfiguring another designer or concept artist's seed of an idea or paying homage to the *Metroid* franchise's legacy. So I'm grateful for the leadership and collaboration that made each *Prime* game possible."

METROID PRIME REMASTERED

UPDATING A CLASSIC FOR THE HD ERA

Widely regarded as one of most impressive Nintendo remakes available, *Prime Remastered* employs modern tech to elevate every aspect of the original *Metroid Prime*. To all intents and purposes, *Remastered* looks and plays like a new game and not a recreation of a GameCube title from 2002. The most obvious improvements made by the Switch update come in the form of its stunning HD graphics, enhanced sound and multiple control options, the last of which includes dual-stick controls that allow you to move about and look around at the same time. *Remastered* also offers touch controls, simulates the GameCube original's controls and has hybrid touch/GameCube-like controls, but the dual-stick option is the one that really makes the remake feel up to date. Some subtle concessions to difficulty also help *Remastered* feel more modern, like its optional hint system, which marks your next objective on the map for you if you spend too much time failing to find it for yourself. There's also a Morph Ball jump that saves you from wasting timed bombs. *Remastered* additionally includes several narration modes: off, on for cinematics only and on throughout. The Switch title's many other plus points include amended log book entries that fix plot and canon errors, in-game alerts for when you unlock extras and settings to help players that struggle to distinguish red, green and blue. As you would expect, *Remastered* has absolutely zero load times, and of course, since it's a Switch game you can play it on the go.

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ALIEN SYNDROME

ULTIMATE GUIDE

REMEMBER THE BACK OF THE ARCADE, WHERE THE NOT-SO-FLASHY COIN-OPS LURKED IN THE DARKNESS, WAITING TO BE DISCOVERED? BACK IN 1987, THIS IS WHERE YOU'D LIKELY HEAR A BLOOD-CURDLING FEMALE SCREAM THAT COULD BELONG TO ONLY ONE GAME… SEGA'S COIN-OP CREATURE FEATURE ALIEN SYNDROME

WORDS BY MARTYN CARROLL

» [Arcade] When you've rescued enough captives, the exit door opens and a boss battle awaits.

"ALIENS HAD A STRONG INFLUENCE ON THE GAME, AS DID ATARI'S GAUNTLET"

» [Arcade] The bosses are easier when playing in co-op, as one of the players can draw their attention.

Following the success of James Cameron's *Aliens* in 1986, a trio of licensed games were quickly developed for home systems. In the arcades though – a space-like vacuum existed. Konami would eventually release an *Aliens* coin-op in 1990, but until then fans had to make do with games merely inspired by the blockbuster movie. The most obvious and blatant example was *Alien Syndrome*, released in April 1987.

It's not clear why Sega didn't acquire the *Aliens* licence at that time, as it would later do with its *Alien 3* arcade game. We know that licensing arrangements can be as labyrinthine as LV-426's terraforming colony, so perhaps the various home versions prevented it from doing so. Regardless, Sega pushed ahead with its own spin, replacing Ripley and Hicks with Mary and Ricky, two soldiers tasked with saving their friends from a foul alien race. The game takes place across six main stages, each a different spaceship infested with aliens. A bomb is set at the *beginning* of each stage (hardly the most prudent plan, guys), and then you have limited time to search the ship and free as many people as possible before the whole place blows. Standing in your way are a bunch of regular aliens and a big old boss that attempts to block your escape. Thankfully, the ships are well appointed when it comes to weaponry and you can grab effective alternatives to the peashooter you start out with.

Aliens had a strong influence on the game, as did Atari's *Gauntlet* it appears. Each ship is like a mini maze and the action is viewed from a top-down perspective on an eight-way scrolling screen. And just like *Gauntlet*, it was seemingly designed with the coin box in mind. *Alien Syndrome* is tough, thanks to one-hit kills and limited lives. As a single player, it's almost impossible in places. The stages are generally doable but the bosses are *mean*. And there are zero continues! This changes in two-player co-op, where players can pump in coins to continue, providing one of them is still breathing (this feature is disabled during the final two stages however, so the last player standing must soldier on to the end alone).

The game was amongst the first batch to run on Sega's trusty System 16 hardware. As such, it's not the most visually stunning game, but it's certainly no slouch. The pace is quick – the players don't so much run around as skate – and neat parallax effects are used ▶

» [Arcade] The influence of *Aliens* is rather apparent on the game's second stage.

» [Arcade] Sega's game ran on its System 16 hardware. It's not the prettiest of games, but still packs a graphical punch in places.

» A delightful illustration of the game's first boss, Asophy, dominates the arcade flyer.

SYNDROME STRATEGIES

HOW TO QUELL THE ALIEN MENACE

A WELL-FOCUSSED WEAPON

■ Torching aliens might seem like the sensible option, but both the Flamethrower and Fireball weapons play second fiddle to the all-powerful Laser. Not only does it have great range, but it pierces enemies and keeps on going for multiple kills. It's best for boss fights too.

MAKE HASTE, EARN POINTS

■ If you're looking for a high score, it's best to rescue the minimum required number of people and finish the level quickly. This is because you receive a 60k point bonus if you finish with more than 100 on the timer – much more than you get for rescuing everyone.

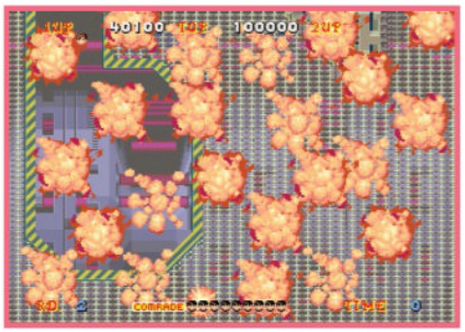
NASTY GREEN MEANIES

■ Most stages have several types of enemy, and some are deadlier than others. On the first stage, watch out for the green worms who spit projectiles. Similarly, on the second stage, watch out for the green pod things that keep spawning enemies like *Gauntlet*'s generators.

THE LONG WAY ROUND

■ The stages are generally open-plan, so it can be tricky knowing which direction to head. We recommend following the perimeter in an anti-clockwise direction, rescuing the people along the outer walls. That should give you enough survivors to open up the exit door.

» [Arcade] Be careful when navigating the catwalks. One misstep and you're in the drink.



» [Arcade] If you fail to clear the stage in time, the bomb detonates and the ship is nuked from orbit.

» [Arcade] Ricky and Mary have exactly the same capabilities. No gender divide in this future.

CONVERSION CAPERS

WHICH OF THE HOME VERSIONS SHONE BRIGHTEST?

MASTER SYSTEM

The first conversion is easily the loosest. The screen flips rather than scrolls, the stages are altered, being more maze-like, and it's the only version that's one-player only. It plays like a prototype of the coin-op – and if you think of it that way, it's actually a fun little game.

NES

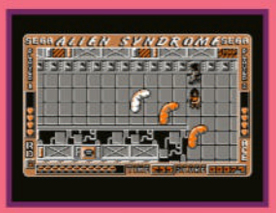
This is more authentic than the SMS version, and does make you wonder if Sega dropped the ball with its game. Some of the bosses are a little off, and it plays at quite a pedestrian pace, but otherwise this is a solid conversion. It even includes a scene-setting intro.

COMMODORE 64

This is a first-rate conversion, with excellent sound and graphics. Co-op play and every coin-op stage is present. Sadly, it does suffer from the old *Boulder Dash* effect, where the player moves faster than the screen can scroll (this was fixed in the subsequent NTSC version).

ZX SPECTRUM

Colour is limited and the scrolling is choppy, but this plays pretty well – especially in co-op. Sadly, there's no 128K version, which means blip-blip sound effects and a multi-load. Plus, there are only five stages in total (the coin-op's third and fifth stages have been binned).



AMSTRAD CPC

Hurrah, this is *not* a lazy Speccy port. Alas, that would have been better, as this is a shoddy effort. Both character movement and scrolling is jerky, which makes it almost impossible to progress. The publisher (Softek) should have jettisoned this version out of an airlock.

MSX

Now, this *is* a lazy Speccy port. Like similar rush jobs, the MSX version is identical save for a muted colour palette and a much poorer framerate. This plays like a fever dream where you're trying to run away from monsters but your legs are leaden. Next…

ATARI ST

The 16-bit difference is noticeable – it plays much quicker than the 8-bit versions, matching the coin-op's frantic pace. On the downside, stages four and five are missing, and it suffers from the usual ST limitation, where the horizontal scrolling lacks smoothness.

AMIGA

A straight port of the ST release. How straight? Well, the lumpy horizontal scrolling has been carried over, rather than being optimised for the Amiga hardware. There's better news in the audio department, where the sound effects are much closer to those in the coin-op.

PC (DOS)

This is curious. It's extremely similar to the ST and Amiga versions, only here *all* of the levels are included and the horizontal scrolling issue is not present. However, the overall presentation is not up to the same standard, with the sound being the main pain point.

SHARP X68000

This debuted in 1992, giving developer Dempa five years to come up with an arcade-perfect port. And it succeeded. In fact, this improves on the coin-op visually, with more vibrant colours replacing the original's pastels. Another triumph in the X68000's ridiculous library.

to add a sense of depth. The sprites are small, at least until you meet the bosses. This is where the design work excels, with each one resembling a Lovecraftian cosmic horror. This is also when playing as a pair pays off, as one can draw the boss' attack while the other happily blasts it. The game's audio deserves special mention for eschewing the usual action soundtrack in favour of a moody, foreboding theme that resembles Ennio Morricone's synthesiser score from John Carpenter's *The Thing*. And then there are the sound effects, particularly the heroine's ear-splitting scream when she cops it.

This memorable element was highlighted in Clare Edgeley's glowing review for *CVG* magazine. "The woman's scream is so shocking," she wrote in the July 1987 issue. "I've never heard anything so loud and chilling on a coin-op before. The music sounds like a cross between *Jaws* and an old Vincent Price horror movie… one minute you're standing in a deafening arcade, the next you're transported to a sinister spaceship. [It's] like walking into the coin-op version of the movie *Aliens*." Elsewhere, *Zzap!64* called it "simply brilliant" and *Sinclair User* said it was a "ten out of ten". In 1988, when considering the newly released home-computer conversions, *CVG* made an interesting observation about the game's standing. "*Alien Syndrome* is one of the unsung heroes of the Sega stable," wrote Eugene Lacey. "Everyone has heard of *Out Run*, *After Burner* and *Thunder Blade*, but somehow *Alien Syndrome* never quite made it into the super game league." And that was just fine – the game always was a B-title compared to Sega's blockbusters, which was fitting given its sci-fi/horror B-movie themes.

The first home conversion was released by Sega itself for the Master System in 1987, a few months after the coin-op. This suggests the development periods overlapped and perhaps explains why the console version is quite different from the coin-op (the lack of co-op play was the key difference). The later conversions were far more faithful, including the competing NES version which was published by Sunsoft in Japan (and released elsewhere by Tengen without a Nintendo licence). The 8/16-bit computer versions were handled by Softek and released on its ACE label.

Easily the most interesting home version is the 1992 Game Gear one, because it's not really a conversion at all. The intro reveals that it takes place five years after the first invasion, identifying it as a *sequel*. And very good it is too, adding new features such as being able to power-up individual weapons (if you grab the Fireball weapon when you already hold it, for example, it gives it homing capabilities – very useful). There's even a secret final boss battle against a very *Aliens*-like Queen – but

"THE GAME'S AUDIO DESERVES SPECIAL MENTION FOR ESCHEWING THE USUAL ACTION SOUNDTRACK"

DEVELOPER Q&A

DARRIN STUBBINGTON WORKED ON THE COMMODORE 64 VERSION FOR SOFTEK

What's the backstory behind the C64 conversion, Darrin?
Softek was looking for a team to convert *Alien Syndrome* in a deal it had with IDG-Sega. IDG – International Development Group – would develop Sega's coin-op conversions cheaply in the UK and then adapt them for the NTSC market. Softek met with myself and programmer Tim Rogers following the release of our first game, *WAR* for Martech. We pitched ourselves as being able to do a pretty faithful C64 version. This was based on young bravado, no fear of failure, and the desire to work on something bigger.

"A BRAND-NEW COIN-OP WAS DELIVERED TO MY HOME"

Were you given access to the coin-op, and any other assets to help you?
Yes. A brand-new coin-op was delivered to my home in Newbury. Unfortunately it was too big to get indoors, so I had it set up in the garage during the winter. Think of me, freezing cold with a small electric heater at my feet. I moved my development C64 to the garage and began working on the graphics and maps. I transcribed every map to graph paper, which took a while, and recreated them on the C64. Next, I did the same for all of the enemies. Again, this took months. Meanwhile, lucky Tim got to stay indoors at his house coding, visiting daily to study certain aspects. Sega did *not* provide any source code or assets, which meant creating a complete simulation.

Did those big end-of-stage bosses cause any issues?
The bosses were a key feature of this game, so we wanted to reproduce them as best as possible. This wasn't easy on the C64. The bosses were in fact a mix of character graphics and sprites, multiplexed of course to get more on the screen. This was very complex and processor intensive, but we were determined to faithfully reproduce the *entire* game experience, not just cheat and skip bits.

The screen scroll was quite slow…
We tried a two pixel scroll per frame but it was running at 25fps and looked bad to us. We chose to keep to our mantra of 50fps or nothing, which meant a one pixel per frame scroll. Hence the scroll update problem. We fixed the issue in the NTSC version, thanks to the extra raster time allowing us to properly implement a two pixel per frame scroll. This meant that the screen counts kept up with you as you moved. I also converted the NTSC version to load from turbo disk, which was so much better than tape.

What did you do after finalising *Alien Syndrome*?
I spent three weeks in San Diego finalising the NTSC version. Following this, IDG offered me a job which I started in January 1989, having moved to the Bay Area. My job was to make PAL Sega games work on NTSC systems, by altering the graphics and fixing bugs. And I'm still in California today, though mostly retired these days.

» [C64] The backgrounds might have been plain, but the boss battles still packed a punch on the old beige box.

» [C64] Darrin Stubbington handled the graphics for the game, and later optimised it for NTSC machines.

BOSS RUSH

GOT YOUR LASER GUN WITH YOU? GOOD…

ASOPHY

■ The first boss is foul – and formidable. It will slowly advance on your position while ejecting deadly yellow globs and purple wormies.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: See that, erm, slit in its body? Laser it when it briefly opens. After its body explodes, concentrate on the head (it's only vulnerable when it rushes at you).

HUGGER

■ This boss is cowering within circles of fleshy organs. Lovely. Every few seconds it will spit mini organs that home in on you.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Destroy the outer circle of organs with your Laser, then shoot the boss through the gaps in the inner circle. Attacking from below is advantageous.

TAKAPY

■ This many-legged, bug-eyed beastie is protected by a permeable membrane. Beware its roving eyes and stomach parasites.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Start by shooting holes through the membrane so you can target its eight legs. When it's finally legless, unload on its body until it bursts.

MINNOW

■ Take a dive with this *Darius* boss reject. It floats up and down, firing a barrage of slimy projectiles that can be tricky to avoid.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: You'll need to be on your toes, running up and down to avoid its constant fire. To kill it, just keep zapping its vulnerable skull with your Laser.

YOCOTIE

■ Fancy a deep space game of whack-a-mole? Giger-esque horrors emerge from the holes while the boss spits acid death at you.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Ignore the boss and start by destroying the 'moles' – three or four should be enough. This will give you time and space to target the boss' head.

MINEMOR

■ What in the body horror hell is going on here? This grotesque 'thing' jumps around the screen, squirting out maggoty little men.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Ignore the maggots (unless they get too close) and concentrate your Laser on the fleshy neck section beneath the head. Diagonal shots work well.

HAGGAH

■ For the final boss you're stripped of your weapon upgrades so you must rely on your standard gun. Watch out for the swirling mini vortex things.
HOW TO BEAT THEM: Your target is the smaller horned head that bobs around at the top. Get up close and plug away at it, only moving aside when the vortexes appear.

» [Master System] Watch out for those little green heads that appear on the floor. Shoot them for bonus points.

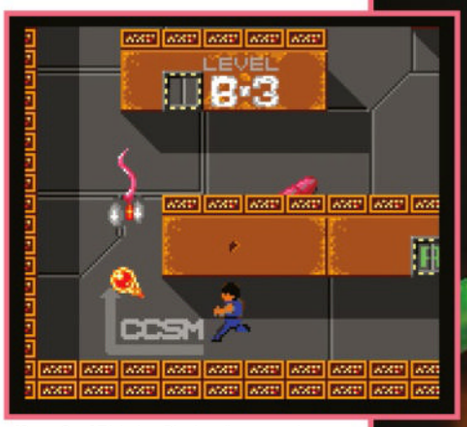
» [Sharp X68000] Developed by Dempa, the version for Sharp's Japanese computer is superb, looking even better than the original.

"EASILY THE MOST INTERESTING HOME VERSION IS THE GAME GEAR ONE"

only if you complete the game on Hard mode. The thing is: there's no conventional way to unlock this mode and instead you must enter a special code (tap 1, 2, 1, 2 on the title screen, button-code nostalgics). It's not clear why this true ending was locked away. Perhaps the familiar design of the final boss troubled the legal department.

***Alien Syndrome* was resurrected as part of the *Sega Ages 2500* range on the PS2 in 2004.** Rather than a straight-up arcade port, it was a modern update that featured polygonal graphics and twin-stick controls. A nice little bonus for fans is some brief commentary from the game's designer, Hiroshi Aso, included on the insert. He revealed that the perspective was indeed inspired by *Gauntlet*, and that he felt the atmospheric audio was a vital element. "The game has almost no music," he reflected. "I personally love sound effects and I didn't want to include flashy music that would drown them out. So I requested music that would make the effects stand out. You could often

» [PlayStation 2] Released as a standalone title in Japan, the 2004 PS2 reimaging was included elsewhere on the *Sega Classics Collection*. Sadly, it was left out of the European release.



» [Game Gear] Trick shot. Blasting aliens around a corner in the update/sequel for Sega's handheld.

» [Game Gear] Here's the 'mother creature', a hidden final boss battle that can only be accessed using a secret code.

hear Marie's death throes in the arcades, right?" Fascinatingly, he reveals that a direct sequel was once on the cards. "I proposed a sequel for Sega's System 24 that would include more strategic elements and branching stages, but it was scrapped and never made. Even now, if there was an offer, I'd definitely like to make another one." The System 24 hardware featured a 24Hz monitor, meaning a higher-resolution display, and typically had =support for three or four players, so that was an unfortunate game that wasn't.

In 2007, a fresh new update was released for the Nintendo Wii and Sony PSP. It was simply titled *Alien Syndrome* and developed without the original team's involvement. You can read more about that elsewhere in this feature. The update is a pleasant homage to the original, overburdened by RPG elements designed to add depth. It's fine, but playing it makes us long for the simple thrills and chills of the original coin-op – which, happily, was included as an unlockable bonus game in *Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection*, released for PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 in 2009.

ALIEN RESURRECTION

THE ORIGINAL GETS LEVELLED UP – LITERALLY

Released in 2007, on the original's 20th anniversary, this update for the Sony PSP and Nintendo Wii was developed by California-based Totally Games. The story takes place 100 years after the original – but regardless, there's basically more alien scum that needs exterminating. The biggest change is the introduction of RPG elements to the standard run-and-gun gameplay. There are five different types of player class, each with its own proficiencies and weapon upgrade tree.

Like so many belated updates, it falls into the trap of adding 'necessary' new features that overcomplicate the game, especially on the PSP where players are likely looking for a quick blast. The additions do work better on the Wii, but naturally this version is hamstrung by clunky motion controls (there's sadly no twin-stick option using the Wii's Classic Controller). On the plus side, both versions support four-player co-op play (local on the Wii, over wireless on the PSP), and there are 40 stages to blaze through. The game can be picked up inexpensively these days, which makes it easier to recommend.

Commodore 128

» **MANUFACTURER:** Commodore » **YEAR:** 1985
» **COST:** £269.99 (launch), £400+ (today, boxed), £200+ (today, unboxed)

Keen not to appear as though it was coasting on the success of the Commodore 64, Commodore introduced the Commodore 128 as an upgraded machine that wouldn't tread on the toes of the company's real next-generation product – the Amiga. Beside the headline RAM upgrade, the new computer added a new display controller with higher resolution output, an operating mode for dedicated Commodore 128 software with an upgraded version of BASIC, and a Z80 CPU for running CP/M software. Of course, the new computer was also compatible with software written for the Commodore 64.

Unfortunately, the Commodore 128 wasn't really built with gaming performance in mind, and the Commodore 64 compatibility meant that developers could target the older system without losing owners of the new one. As such, anyone interested in gaming could safely choose the cheaper machine, and with the business market rapidly adopting IBM PC clones, the Commodore 128 didn't achieve nearly the same sales success as the Commodore 64. The more modern case design did at least inspire the style of the redesigned Commodore 64C in 1986. ✱

Commodore 128 fact

■ **Commodore 64 compatibility was included because of an encounter Commodore's hardware designer Bil Herd had with a software developer, who was unhappy that her C64 software wouldn't run on the Plus/4.**

GRAPHICS: VDC-8563 (80 CHARACTER MODE), VIC-II (320X200 DISPLAY, 16 COLOURS, EIGHT HARDWARE SPRITES)

AUDIO: SID SOUND CHIP, THREE CHANNELS WITH FOUR WAVEFORMS PER CHANNEL AND A MULTI-MODE FILTER

MEDIA: ROM CARTRIDGE, 5.25 INCH FLOPPY DISK (OPTIONAL), CASSETTE TAPE (OPTIONAL)

PROCESSOR: 8-BIT MOS TECHNOLOGY 8502 (2.04MHZ), 8-BIT Z80 (2.04MHZ)

RAM: 128KB MAIN MEMORY

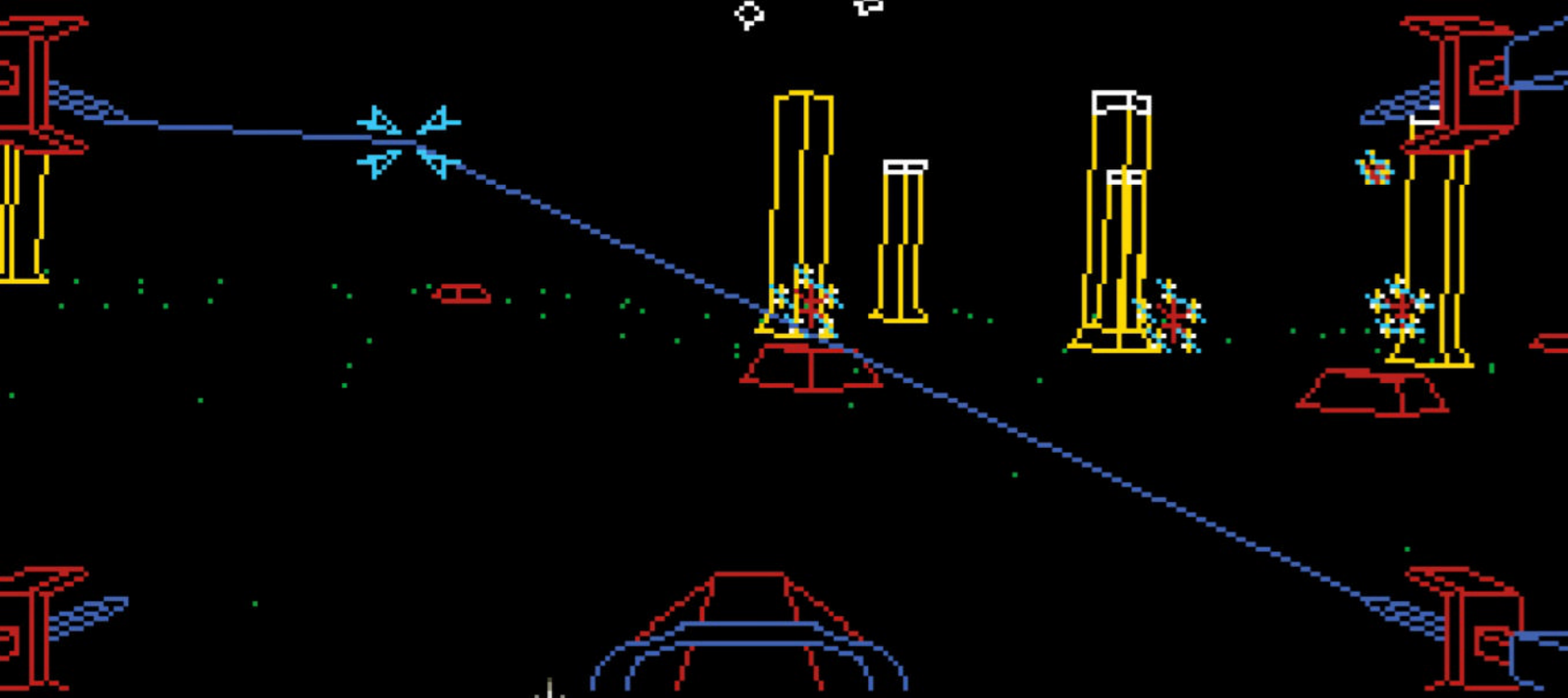
SUPPLIED BY
EVAN AMOS

Endurance
The monkey grinder looks you up and down, "Peasants," he sniffs, adjusting a knob on his hurdy-gurdy. "Like unto sheep."
He turns the crank of the hurdy-gurdy, and the air is filled with the combined stench of five herds of sheep, accompanied by a cacophany of hateful bleating.
[Your endurance just went down.]
"Coward!" taunts the monkey grinder as you duck out of range.
Accardi-by-the-Sea

ESSENTIAL GAME

Beyond Zork

It may seem odd to feature a text-based adventure game here, but this one is unusual among Infocom's adventures in that it never made it to the Commodore 64. As well as utilising the extra memory of the beefier machine, the game uses the 80-column display mode, allowing for a basic map to be shown on the screen alongside other information. There were other signs of evolution, too – with RPG elements and even some combat, moving the game away from the puzzle emphasis of Infocom's prior output.



A TRIBUTE TO DOMARK

FORMED IN 1984 BY TWO MARKETING EXECUTIVES WITH ZERO EXPERIENCE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY, DOMARK WENT ON TO BECOME ONE OF THE MOST PROMINENT UK SOFTWARE HOUSES OF THE EIGHTIES AND NINETIES. RETRO GAMER LOOKS BACK AT ITS MOST SIGNIFICANT GAMES WITH COFOUNDER DOMINIC WHEATLEY

WORDS BY GRAEME MASON

When marketing exec Dominic Wheatley spotted his brother playing an early computer adventure game, he instantly saw the potential. Along with partner Mark Strachan, the pair quit advertising and formed Domark in 1984, developing their own adventure game, *Eureka!*. With marketing inevitably at the forefront, Domark (an amalgamation of the names Dominic and Mark) withstood early difficulties before securing a company-shaping licence, James Bond, via a contact in the Ian Fleming estate.

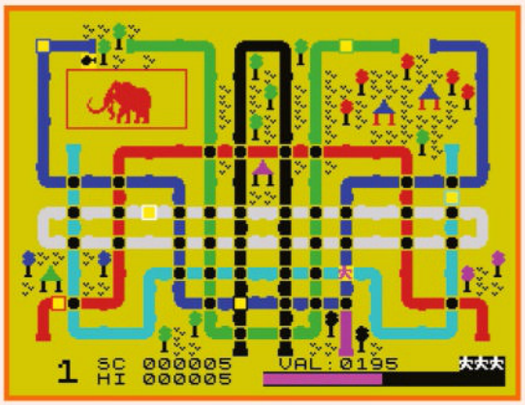
A View To A Kill (1985) was a moderate success for Domark, but it was another licence, this time of a phenomenally successful board game, that forged the company's fortunes for the next few years. Developed by Oxford Digital Enterprises, *Trivial Pursuit* (full story in **RG** 263) and its multiple sequels and add-ons, secured Domark's existence for several years, enabling it to investigate other properties and weather the shift from 8 to 16-bit. Bitten by the licensing bug, Dominic and Mark firmly believed you needed a licensed property to make a game stand out, and dabbled in all manner of media throughout the Eighties. Book, arcade game, TV and movie licences all appeared under the Domark (or one of its sub-labels) branding, with varying degrees of commercial and critical success.

Like many early software houses, Domark initially relied on third-party developers, publishing the best of the many submissions it received. Eventually, it established its own in-house team of creatives, The Kremlin, and it produced much of Domark's output in the early to mid-Nineties. The submissions continued to arrive, however, and one of its most successful releases came from two brothers, Paul and Oliver Collyer, and their ground-breaking football management sim, *Championship Manager*.

Throughout the early Nineties, Domark appeared to manage the move from computer to console, inking a deal with Sega to publish several games each year on the Mega Drive and Master System as the 8-bit markets evaporated. However, with demanding royalty deals from console manufacturers now routine, it would only take one late or disappointing game to scupper its fortunes. For Domark, that game was *Marko*, also known as *Marko's Magic Football*. Hamstrung by the resignation of its lead programmer, this football-platform hybrid stagnated, prompting the company's bank manager to call time. A meeting with Eidos PLC's Charles Cornwall brought respite, as Domark was corporately reversed into Eidos during 1995, enabling it to raise funds. The move meant a change of name, too, and Domark was no more – long live Eidos! Well, until it was acquired by SCi in 2005. ✱

DOMINIC WHEATLEY

■ Since leaving Eidos in 1997, Dominic Wheatley has enjoyed a varied career in both the games and technology industries. However, those heady days at the start of the UK's computer-game industry remain his fondest.



EUREKA!

C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1984

Having made his name and fortune cofounding wargame maker Games Workshop and the hugely successful series of *Fighting Fantasy* gamebooks, Ian Livingstone pivoted to videogames in 1984, writing the text adventure *Eureka!*, Domark's first game. While the addition of arcade elements helped elevate the game above its peers, Eureka's difficulty put off many gamers, although not 15-year-old Matthew Woodley, whose reward for completing *Eureka!* was a cheque for £25,000 from the newly formed software house.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

Ian was introduced to us by David Bishop, and he wrote the game's story – the actual game was written by Andromeda in Hungary. It was our first release, based on an adventure to find a real cash prize. £25,000 was a lot of money back in 1985!"

CODENAME MAT II

AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1984

Derek Brewster expanded on his shooter *Codename MAT* in 1984, switching publishers from Micromega to Domark in the process. The Terramaya war rages on, and MAT, the teenager implanted with the skills of Earth's finest, is defending humankind against the Myons. *Codename MAT II* is an in-depth shoot-'em-up, with two scanners, a battle computer and multiple weapons at MAT's disposal. Author Derek Brewster soon became *Crash* magazine's resident adventure columnist and reviewer, while Domark moved into the licensing world for its next game.

A VIEW TO A KILL

AMSTRAD CPC, C64, MSX, ZX SPECTRUM • 1985

Having debuted (officially) in the 1984 Atari 2600 game, *James Bond 007*, the world's most famous 'secret' spy got a game set in one particular movie a year later. Based on the last of Roger Moore's Bond outings, *A View To A Kill* also kick-started Domark's affiliation with the franchise, and uses a multi-genre approach, designed by David Bishop and Chris Palmer of Tigress Marketing. In the first segment, Bond chases after assassin May Day through the streets of Paris, before escaping from a burning city hall in part two. In the final section, Bond attempts to foil the evil plans of Max Thorin as he seeks to disable the nuclear bomb primed to explode beneath Silicon Valley. Domark poured all of its publicity resources into *A View To A Kill*, and the result was an ambitious, if flawed, take on the iconic super spy.

DIVINE DUTIES

WHILE POORLY RECEIVED, THIS BOND ADAPTATION HAD SOME INTERESTING IDEAS. ANYONE ELSE WANT TO DROP OUT?

BLOODY INTRO

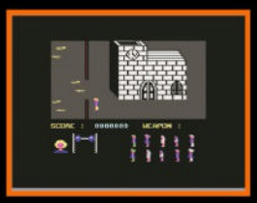
Domark's *A View To A Kill*'s intro does a surprisingly decent job of mimicking the opening of each *Bond* movie. It features a casual Bond strolling on screen before firing at the viewer. Cue the blood.

TWO DIFFERENT VIEWS TO ENJOY

First-person action games were exceptionally rare in 1985, and *A View To A Kill* presents a street-based level in which you can also see your vehicle in an overhead map below.

YOU EXPECT ME TO TALK?

While computer games had used synthesised speech, it was still uncommon, especially on systems like the Spectrum. "Bond… James Bond," intones *A View To A Kill*'s intro.



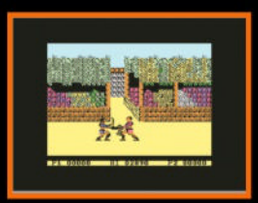
FRIDAY THE 13TH

AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

Buoyed by the moderate success of *A View To A Kill*, Domark secured the licence to this horror franchise with a game based loosely on the second movie. The player's task is to guide the teenage guests of Camp Crystal Lake to safety, avoiding the machete-wielding Jason Voorhees, who is out to avenge the death of his mother in the first film. Domark's marketing skills went into overdrive, offering colour monitors as prizes in a guess-the-sound-effect competition, and including blood capsules with each copy. However, most of the game's reviews were sharper than Jason's blade, eviscerating Domark's efforts into bloody chunks.

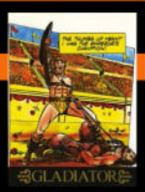
DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

The game was terrible, but marketed very well. I remember the PR event in a wine cellar in the city, with all the games journos there. We sealed up a doorway with paper, and I burst through, screaming while wearing a hockey mask and wielding an axe! Everyone shrieked!" [I'm not surprised – Ed]



GLADIATOR

AMSTRAD CPC, C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986



The Domark movie licence-to-be, preceding the Ridley Scott film by 14 years. Sold as a slave, the player's objective in *Gladiator* is to train and fight in bouts, eventually earning enough cash to buy freedom. With a wide variety of weaponry to choose from and multiple opponents, *Gladiator* appears to offer expansive gameplay. In reality, it's far too hard to be much fun, although its ZX Spectrum original reviewed decently. Released on budget only (by Bug-Byte) for the Commodore 64.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

It was from a developer who just came to us, and it looked pretty sweet. A very nice game that sadly failed to sell very well. It was already proving difficult to succeed unless you had something like a licence to stand out."

SPLIT PERSONALITIES

AMSTRAD CPC, C64, C PLUS/4, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986

This sliding block puzzle game arrived in 1986 courtesy of Dutch programming brothers, Ruud and Ernest Peske. Using the colourful cursor, the player extracts pieces of the image from the top left and distributes them into the play area to form the picture of a well-known contemporary figure. Items such as bombs, matches and diamonds spice things up, and there's a strict time limit to each level. The game's original title, *Splitting Images*, inevitably resulted in Domark having to reissue it under a new title.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

You remember those sliding plastic puzzle things you used to buy for a quid in the shops? It was like those, sort of a one-dimensional Rubik's Cube. But it needed a hook, so we thought about having famous people like Maggie Thatcher and Ronald Reagan. We called it *Splitting Images* because it was a play on the popular show *Spitting Image*. But we soon got a letter from their lawyers!"

GUESS WHO

RETRO GAMER'S FAVOURITE SPLIT PERSONALITIES

RONALD REAGAN

The then-current US president is first up. The extra tiles are the Stars and Stripes and Russian flags – blend them for a 1,500-point bonus.

MICK JAGGER

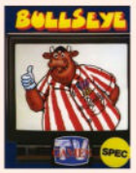
The eternal rock star features later in the game, and his bonus items are a pair of pouting lips and a guitar. Combine them for a megastar-sized bonus.

SIR CLIVE SINCLAIR

Spectrum fans will love the appearance of Sir Clive himself, and they can score a big bonus by combining a brain with the inventor's greatest folly, the C5.

BULLSEYE

AMSTRAD CPC, BBC MICRO/ELECTRON, C64, ZX SPECTRUM • 1986



You can't beat a bit of Bully! The Sunday night staple TV quiz/darts mashup arrived on 8-bit computers in the mid-Eighties. When publisher Macsen went bust (reportedly owing thousands), Domark purchased the rights to its games, creating a new label to publish them under. Throughout 1986 and 1987, TV Games republished the old Macsen games and eventually released its own original efforts. While popular, critics savaged most of its output; however, the simple gameplay of *Bullseye* at least made it enjoyable to play with a friend.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

We thought we ought to have Jim Bowen's face on the front of the packaging; the Macsen game was just Bully holding a dart. So, we found his agent and wrote to him, offering £200 for his likeness to be put on the cassette. Then, we're sitting in the office, and the phone rings. Mark picks it up, and a voice says, 'It's Jim Bowen here.' Mark replies, 'Oh, hello, Mr Bowen.' And Jim says one thing, 'Do you know who I am?' and puts the phone down! I guess we didn't offer enough…"

KAT TRAP

C64, ZX SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC • 1986

When *Crash* magazine launched its Genesis: The Birth Of A Game competition in June of 1986, it could scarcely have anticipated its popularity. Readers were invited to submit their game designs, with the ultimate prize awaiting the overall winner: their design brought to life by programmers Design Design and Domark's new label, Streetwise. Dozens of readers submitted their in-depth game documents, and the eventual winner, Jonathan Eggleton, participated in the process as *Crash* documented *Kat Trap*'s journey from idea to reality, encompassing cover design, tape duplication and marketing. However, despite its interesting origin and some novel ideas, *Kat Trap* is a rather bland and mundane side-on game, with the player controlling MT-ED (geddit?), a brave robot attempting to reclaim the Earth from its new owners, the Cat Men, following a nuclear war. Its decent graphics are stymied by frustrating gameplay, with MT-ED flying across the screen whenever an enemy touches it. Streetwise's next release, *Orbix The Terrorball*, was similarly average, while its third game, *Unitrax*, was barely promoted. Domark quietly abandoned the label in 1987.

TRIVIAL PURSUIT

C64, VARIOUS • 1986

Down on its luck and hit by the abject failure of *Friday The 13th*, Domark's Mark Strachan and Dominic Wheatley struck upon the idea of licensing the phenomenally successful board game *Trivial Pursuit*. The pair appointed developer ODE to translate the game to computer form, and it did a grand job, introducing the cheeky host TP to guide players. The game uses an honour system rather than multiple choice, meaning it's best played with two or more (human) players. There are plenty of questions and two screens, the board itself and a homely living room where TP hurls the questions at each player in turn. *Trivial Pursuit*'s modular design (dubbed Uniload) allowed ODE to create several additional question packs, although its biggest boon was being selected as Game Of The Month for the Book Club Associates' Home Computer Club. It netted Domark a substantial cash injection.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

[*Trivial Pursuit*] was a massive seller – we sold bucketloads at £14.95, albeit about £6 retail. Plus, it got us noted, and we were on our way. Like all game companies, we needed that first hit to fill up the coffers."

A TRIVIAL SERIES A SHORT HISTORY OF TRIVIAL PURSUIT FROM DOMARK

GENUS EDITION

The original hit game that revitalised Domark. Over 3,000 questions, including many musical and picture-based puzzles. Fun for all the family.

BABY BOOMER EDITION

This expansion to the original *Genus* edition focuses on the Sixties, with an additional 3,000 questions of no vital importance.

YOUNG PLAYERS EDITION

Another Uniload expansion, this time featuring two sections: one aimed at 7-12 year olds, and the other at 12 and above.

STAR WARS

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1987

Atari's excellent 1983 arcade game had remained curiously absent from home systems until 1987, when Domark acquired the licence to all three games in the series. Vector experts Vektor Grafix handled the majority of versions, and while some aspects were a little disappointing – the absence of sound on the Spectrum, for example – it was well received, with the official branding offsetting the existence of decent clones such as *3D Starstrike*. Top of the class is the brilliant Amiga version, complete with some of the digitised speech of the arcade game, and Domark followed up *Star Wars* with *The Empire Strikes Back* (1988) and *Return Of The Jedi* (1989).

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

Star Wars was the result of a chance meeting with an agent in Las Vegas. No one thought it would do well, but I knew the coin-op game and sure enough – a number-one hit!"

I CAN'T SHAKE HIM!

DON'T WANT TO END UP LIKE BIGGS? HERE'S RETRO GAMER'S STAR WARS TIPS

DARTH EVADER

Shooting Darth Vader's Advanced TIE fighter discourages the Sith Lord, giving Luke some vital breathing space. It also scores 2,000 points for each hit, so keep targetting him.

GREAT SHOT, KID

Luke automatically switches to Proton Torpedoes at the end of the trench run – all you need to do is focus on getting the aim right. Get it right and you'll be treated to the Death Star blowing up.

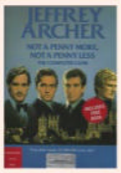
STAY ON TARGET

Darth's TIE fighter has a habit of hovering around the edges of the screen, making it hard to target. Wait until it's lined up and then pummel your [SPOILER ALERT] dad with laser fire.

$0250000 owed
You are in your room in Magdalen College, Oxford. Books line the walls, above cupboards. There is a television. Next to the phone on your desk is a folder, which you are reading.
retro gamer is ace

NOT A PENNY MORE, NOT A PENNY LESS

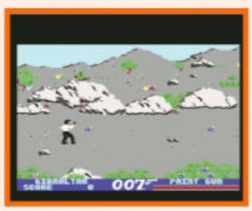
AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS • 1987



Domark's sole venture into bookware came in 1987 with this adaptation of Jeffrey Archer's debut novel, and squeezing the book, laden with multiple characters and plots, into computerised form was no easy task. The player is Stephen Bradley, one of the men swindled by crook Harvey Metcalfe. From Bradley's base at Magdalen College, he plots with three other victims to get back at Metcalfe by utilising their respective skills. With its synthesised speech and digitised pictures, the Atari ST version is the best, although the game's unusual parser (for example, to visit people, you must 'Examine' them) is cumbersome throughout each format.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

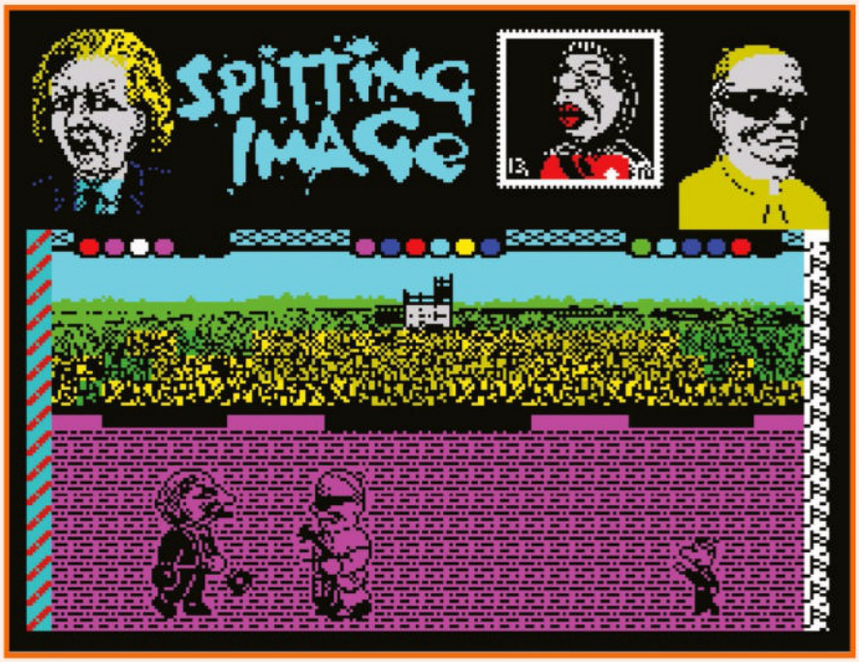
We went to see him at his penthouse apartment at the top of Alembic House, the other side of the Thames to Parliament. He was very engaging and interested in us as entrepreneurs – he called us Thatcher's Children. The publisher placed a massive order, and we received a nice cheque, but I have no idea if they sold any. I do know we hardly sold any over here!"



THE LIVING DAYLIGHTS

AMSTRAD CPC, VARIOUS • 1986

Following Roger Moore's retirement in 1985, the Broccolis selected Timothy Dalton as their new Bond, ushering in a grittier portrayal of the main character and theme. *The Living Daylights* was a solid hit in cinemas, and Domark cemented its reputation with the licence, producing several iterations across various home computers. As in the movie, *The Living Daylights* begins in Gibraltar as Bond first encounters a conspiracy to eliminate British spies. From there, the action shifts to Russia, before a dangerous encounter with the world's deadliest milkman (actually henchman Necros in disguise) in the English countryside and a finale at villain Brad Whittaker's villa in Tangiers. Walking Circles took on the Spectrum game and included lightgun compatibility, but while the level descriptions mimic the movie across each version, there's actually little variety in this rather plain run-and-gun game.



SPITTING IMAGE

ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1988

Having gotten into hot water over its original title for *Split Personalities* (*Splitting Images*), Domark cheekily went back to Fluck and Law two years later and acquired the official computer licence to the satirical show. The question was, how to take a humorous rubber puppet show and turn it into a playable and entertaining game while retaining its anarchic spirit? It was an unenviable task, and one that sadly retrogressed into a simple one-on-one beat-'em-up for one or two players. Having selected your character and opponent – from a limited set of six world leaders – battle takes place in front of various famous locations relative to the combatants, including Number Ten Downing Street, The Vatican and The Kremlin. Bolted on to some throwaway plot about an impending war instigated by one of the leaders, there's plenty of humour throughout, especially in the game's instructions, which insults as many nations as possible within its short length. *Spitting Image* remains, however, a very routine fighter, and a waste of the licence.

SHARP BARBS

WHILE THE GAME ISN'T UP TO MUCH, THERE'S PLENTY OF HUMOUR IN SPITTING IMAGE

SPITTING IMAGE
WITHIN THE NEXT SEVEN YEARS A WORLD WAR GREATER THAN ALL OTHER WARS WILL TAKE PLACE. A WAR SO GREAT EVEN THE SWISS WILL GET INVOLVED THIS TIME. A WAR SO TERRIBLE THAT THE NATIONS HAVE ALREADY SURRENDERED. ONE LEADER WILL EMERGE FROM THIS WAR TO RULE THE WORLD.
IT IS YOUR TASK TO STOP THIS LEADER AND SAVE THE WORLD. THESE ARE THE SIX CHALLENGERS FOR WORLD POWER...

NEUTRAL NO MORE

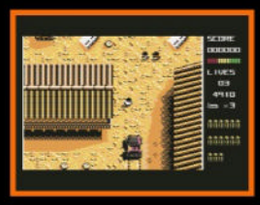
"Within the next seven years, a world war will take place. A war so great that even the Swiss will get involved this time."

DRY FLIGHT

"From there you will be flown… to the home territory of the target leader. To comply with the new 1992 EEC regulations, there will be no duty-free goods during the flight."

BETTER THAN YOU

"The kid down the street did better than you, and he's only been playing computer games for a week, and probably his mum could even beat your score."

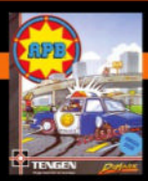


LICENCE TO KILL

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1989

Timothy Dalton's second (and final) appearance as James Bond became Domark's best home-computer adaptation of the franchise when it debuted in 1989. Taking its cue from three significant scenes in the movie, Domark's development team expanded each segment, putting Bond and Felix Leiter in a chopper for the first section, as they chase down the fleeing evil drug lord Sanchez. Then Bond pursues the villain on foot, before a helicopter-to-plane transfer and a spot of waterskiing. Finally, Bond must stop Sanchez once and for all, this time behind the wheel of an 18-wheeler tanker truck. While essentially presenting the same top-down view throughout, *Licence To Kill* boasts enough variety and sleek gameplay to elevate it above its fellow Domark *Bond* games.

APB



ZX SPECTRUM, VARIOUS • 1989

While it wasn't the first game of the Tengen-Domark deal, *APB* was the title that put the relationship on the map after the disappointing release of *Vindicators*. The player is Officer Bob, a tough cop in a tough town, where jaywalkers and litterers mix with master criminals. Officer Bob brings in suspects for questioning before charging them once he has gathered enough evidence. Should he fail to secure enough collars, the chief issues a demerit; too many of these, and it's game over. While patrolling the streets can be over-fussy, the developers (including Walking Circles, again) did a grand job of replicating the arcade game's high-speed thrills. Other notable Tengen-Domark games from this period include *Escape From The Planet Of The Robot Monsters*, *Xybots* and *Hard Drivin'*.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

Three of them from Tengen came over to see us, including Randy Broweleit, the head guy. We had a great time with them; all got along famously, and they were thrilled that we'd made them so much money [with *Star Wars*]. So they told us they wanted Domark to be their representative and to do all the home-computer versions."

KLAX

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1990

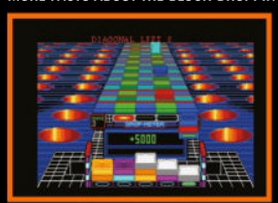
Domark hit both critical and commercial success with its impressive adaptation of the Atari arcade puzzle game. Inspired by the incredible popularity of *Tetris*, *Klax* features five conveyor belts on which a series of coloured blocks travel. The aim is to catch tiles with a paddle and place them in one of the wells at the bottom of the screen. Form a pile of three tiles of the same colour and a Klax is scored, netting a score bonus. Like all the best arcade puzzlers, *Klax* begins serenely enough, before presenting some sneakily complex later levels that'll challenge even the most experienced gamer. *Klax* also marked a change within Domark, as it shifted its focus from 8-bit computers to consoles. It's a great conversion from Domark, with hardly any of its offerings disappointing.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

We got the Sega licence from Virgin after they bought Mastertronic. We could see the writing was on the wall for the 8-bit market – sales were getting less and less, and I think people were getting disenfranchised with the quality of the games."

KLAX TRIVIA

MORE FACTS ABOUT THE BLOCK-DROPPING WONDER



AMIGA FIRST

Klax began life on the Amiga, with coder Dave Akers creating a demo of the game on the Commodore computer.

A HANDY JAM

Mark Stephen Pierce came up with the iconic 'hand' graphic while stuck in traffic on Highway 101 in California.

CLEVER AUDIO

The audio effects in *Klax* are largely cadged from Mark's Atari colleagues, while the scream is his very own voice.

CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER

AMIGA, ATARI ST, PC • 1992

The start of the series that ruined a thousand marriages. Building on the template laid down by Kevin Toms' genre-defining *Football Manager*, the Collyer brothers created a monster in 1992, with Domark quick to latch onto the yearly update tactic. *Championship Manager 93*, *Championship Manager 2* (1995) and more followed before Eidos took over the reins.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

We received a disk in the post, and somebody said, 'We've got this great football game.' I thought, 'Forget about it; there are loads of them.' However, they persuaded me, and we printed 5,000 copies. Then another 5,000. Then, we needed 10,000 more. The brothers' first royalty cheque was for £75,000 – they turned up that Christmas in brand-new Golf GTis!"

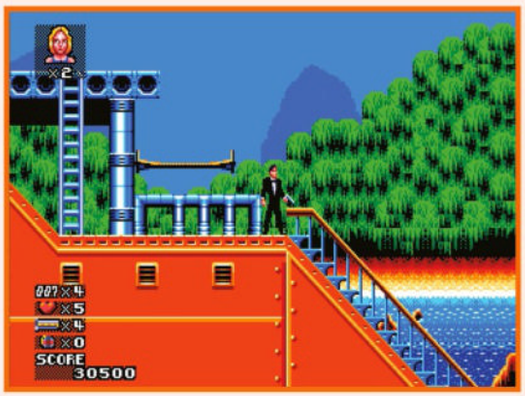
INTERNATIONAL RUGBY CHALLENGE

AMIGA, ATARI ST, MEGA DRIVE, PC • 1993

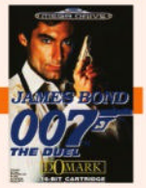
Domark had often clashed with magazine critics in its time, but even this was something special. Reviewing *International Rugby Challenge* – a sequel to 1991's *Rugby: The World Cup* – in *Amiga Power*, Stuart Campbell awarded the simulation the princely total of 2%, questionably comparing the game to the then-current war in Bosnia, the famine in Somalia and the Rodney King beating. The Sega Mega Drive game was better received, but Domark nevertheless gave up on the idea of rugby videogames.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

The Sega game did OK, but when we tried to market it to the US, we got complaints because one of the teams was called the All Blacks!"



JAMES BOND: THE DUEL



GAME GEAR, MASTER SYSTEM, MEGA DRIVE • 1993

Domark brought 007 to consoles in 1993 despite the absence of a new movie, marking the last appearance in the role for Timothy Dalton. Featuring a fresh storyline, Bond battles against legacy villains such as Jaws and Oddjob over a series of familiar and glamorous locations. The critical reception was mixed, but Game Gear and Master System versions followed in 1993.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

It was a totally new story, and the last *James Bond* game for us. There was a legal dispute that stopped the movies, and by the time it started up again, we'd been passed by. Eventually, Electronic Arts picked up the rights. It just sort of fizzled out for us."

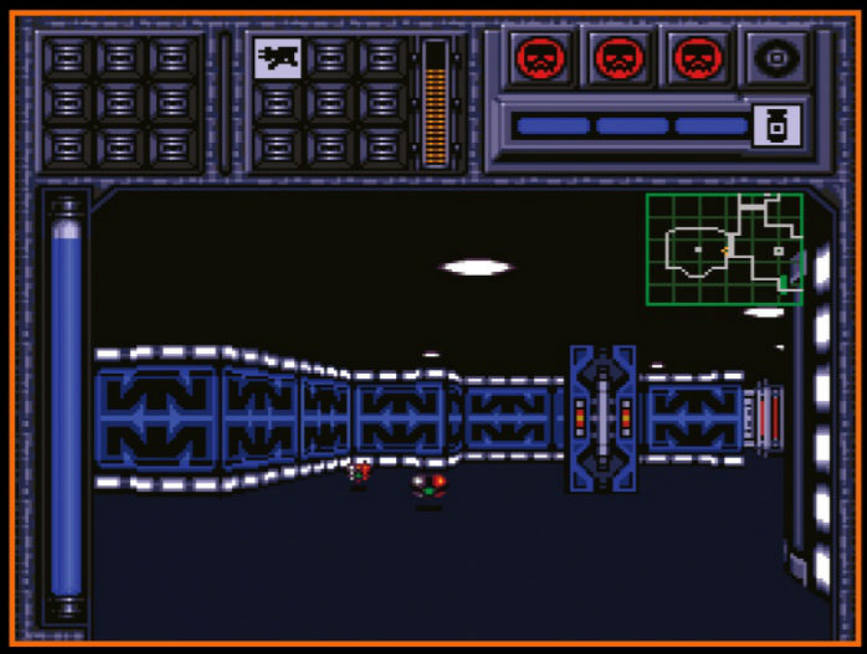
F1

AMIGA, VARIOUS • 1993

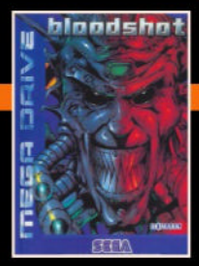
Domark's *Champions Of Sport* label debuted in 1993 with *International Rugby Challenge* and this Formula One racing simulation from French developer, Lankhor. Boosted by an official licence, it contains 12 tracks and 13 drivers, all competing over an entire F1 season, plus two modes (arcade and simulation) and a two-player option. Despite some mixed reviews, with praise for its speed and criticism for its realism, it sold well for the publisher, cementing Domark's position in the console market.

DOMINIC'S MEMORIES

I believe it was the first official *F1* game. It was also a brilliant game, sold hundreds of thousands, and was derivative of Lankhor's earlier *Vroom*."



BLOODSHOT

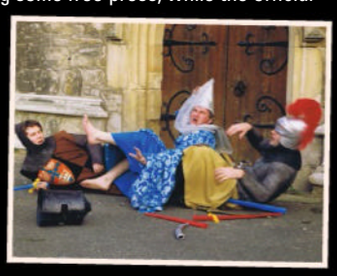


MEGA CD, MEGA DRIVE • 1994

By the mid-Nineties, Domark's in-house development team, The Kremlin, was fully established, and this was its brave attempt to bring the first-person shooter to the Sega Mega Drive. Instigated by the Kremlin's Jim Blackler, who presented a workable demo to Domark, the team battled against the odds to produce an impressive playable FPS at an acceptable speed. As the recipient of the Battle Frenzy chip, the player is a lone soldier, sent to the Moon to defend it against marauding aliens. Renamed *Battle Frenzy* in the US to avoid confusion with the Valiant comic, *Bloodshot* even accommodates a split-screen two-player mode, and features some bizarre enemies.

THE MASTERS OF MARKETING

Dominic and Mark may not have known much about videogames – but they certainly knew their way around a marketing campaign. From their very first game, *Eureka!*, with which they offered an incredible prize of £25,000 (the equivalent of nearly £103,000 today), should anyone complete it (inevitably somebody did – nothing like the incentive of a shedload of cash), the pair excelled at creating promotional campaigns to endorse their games. Press launches were a particular favourite of the pair, and at one, for *Friday The 13th: The Computer Game*, Dominic burst in on an unsuspecting collection of journalists dressed in Jason Voorhees garb, before discovering his partner Mark's 'decapitated' head. Agreeing to publish the winning entry from *Crash*'s Genesis: Birth Of A Game competition was another great way of getting some free press, while the official *Spitting Image* licence gave them the chance to have some fun with the popular rubber puppets. A wacky photo op was never far away, either, such as the time Dominic and Mark messed around with Incentive's Ian Andrew outside a castle to promote Domark's acquisition of the popular Freescape games. Whatever you thought of the quality of Domark's output, over the years, there's no denying that its founders certainly had a great time while publicising its games.



IN THE KNOW

» SYSTEM: Commodore 64

» COMPOSER: Martin Galway, Jon Hare, Chris Yates

» DEVELOPER: Sensible Software

» RELEASED: 1987

» BEST TRACK: Title Tune

MARTIN GALWAY MADE A NAME FOR HIMSELF IN THE EIGHTIES AS ONE OF THE FINEST COMPOSERS OF COMMODORE 64 SID MUSIC. HERE, HE AND JON HARE RECOLLECT THE HIGHLY CREATIVE ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH WIZBALL'S BLISTERING SCORE WAS COMPOSED

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

***Wizball* is a memorable game, of that there is no doubt.** Challenging, beautifully presented, smooth scrolling and innovative, Sensible Software's iconic shoot-'em-up has long been considered one of the finest titles to grace the Commodore 64.

You get the sense that you're in for a special time as soon as the game loads and much of that is down to the eerie, ethereal music that accompanies the game's title screen. Composed by Martin Galway, it's widely considered to be a real high point in what has long proven to be a glistening career for the accomplished musician. But it's only the start. From the high-score screen to the bonus section, there are more sterling tunes to enjoy, creating a scintillating, synthesised soundtrack that certainly made the machine sing.

» [C64] *Wizball* is packed with amazing sound effects including some very short musical flourishes.

Martin, who worked for Ocean Software, composed *Wizball*'s audio following his work on *Parallax*. "After *Parallax* was such a critical success, I resolved to increase my approach of working with the Sensible Software guys for inspiration," he says. Rather than work remotely and communicate by phone, he felt his creative juices would flow more freely if he was physically part of the development team. "I got permission to jump on the train with two C64s and one or maybe two monitors and go to Jon Hare's house in Ilford," he says, Jon being the cofounder of Sensible Software along with Chris Yates.

"It was hell to get the equipment on and off the train by myself but they met me at Euston Station and helped me get the gear transported," Martin recalls. "I stayed there for at least two weeks, working on the beginning part of the title screen tune and all the other sub-tunes. The compositional process was incredibly fun."

> "I GOT PERMISSION TO JUMP ON THE TRAIN WITH TWO C64S AND ONE OR MAYBE TWO MONITORS AND GO TO JON HARE'S HOUSE IN ILFORD"
> MARTIN GALWAY

Jon recalls the time with great fondness. "My home was a crazy games house at the time," he says. "I shared it with *Zzap!64*'s Gary Liddon and another friend of mine and when Martin stayed we also had Stavros Fasoulas (*Delta* and *Sanxion*) staying over from Finland and Gary Penn (*Zzap!64* legend) sleeping on the sofa."

Jon and Chris are accomplished musicians so they got involved in the creation of the soundtrack. "Those guys both had their guitars sitting around and they helped to come up with most of the melodies," Martin says. It proved to be a winning collaboration and a real mix of ideas. "To create the *Wizball* level music Martin was getting me to come up with bass riffs and Chris to come up with guitar licks and then coding them up into game music," Jon recalls.

Influences came thick and fast. "Check out the first track of the album *China* by Vangelis.

» [C64] Martin has long said his favourite composition is *Wizball*'s suite of music and sound.

» [C64] To inspire Martin, the Sensi guys would pump up the volume on their amps and play guitar riffs.

» [C64] *Wizball* is a tricky game to get to grips with but it gripped players immediately thanks to the iconic title tune.

Just a little bit of influence there," Martin says, referring to *Chung Kuo* released by the Greek electronic composer in 1979. "We were also listening to a lot of Rush and Pink Floyd since those were the favourite two bands of the Sensi guys. Maybe a little bit of Rush's *Spirit Of Radio* leaked in, you tell me," he adds.

Jon and Chris got involved with all of the tunes except one: the title tune. "I came up with the title screen music and it was definitely 'all me' at that point as they were out getting food," Martin says. "I was able to play the first 30 seconds when they came back." Jon and Chris liked what they heard. "We didn't get involved in the title tune because Martin was a pioneering genius of C64 music at the time," Jon affirms.

Since the audio was being created for the Commodore 64, it followed that Martin made use of the SID sound chip to compose the tunes. "It was all assembler language – a musical data language that I designed – with 6502 program code to play the data," Martin says. "I didn't use any other tools of any sort."

He found the C64 allowed him to achieve everything he wanted from the tunes. "I don't think I was particularly constrained. I was usually able to do everything I wanted in about 8KB," he admits. "If I remember correctly, the program code was about 3.5KB which allowed for 4.5KB of data. Once the 'cassette multi-load' era came along, which started with *Athena*, the memory constraints went away. But *Wizball* was a single-load game."

He was able to push the SID chip and make the best use out of it. "My 'offset list mode', which is basically the fast arpeggiation, got a new use case in *Wizball* when I slowed it down and each note was no longer a part of a fast chord," Martin says. "It became a slower arpeggiation basically reminiscent of *Won't Get Fooled Again* by The Who, and using two channels at the same time with a delay allowed for an interesting effect."

During his time jamming with the Sensi guys Martin got most of the music finished. "I had to complete the title tune when I returned to Ocean and you can guess the boundary point," he says. Jon tells us that Martin also wrote the "amazing credits music" in Manchester. It meant the musical wizard had finished *Wizball* with a flourish and a legendary set of tunes were unleashed. "It was an amazing and highly creative time," Jon says.

» [C64] In space, no one can hear you scream but you can certainly delight in *Wizball*'s soundtrack.

A SOUND PROCESS

Martin Galway on sound limitations

■ Although there was music in the bonus part of the game, *Wizball* didn't have a tune during the main play. Instead, the game was accompanied by a set of sound effects and Martin says developers had to make a choice if they wanted a tune. "It was a pretty quick process," he says. "You could have no sound effects (like *Miami Vice* and *Highlander*), or have one channel for music and two for sound effects like the *Wizball* bonus section."

In choosing the latter for one specific part of *Wizball*, Martin produced a different sound. "There's only one music part playing so that sound effects can continue. During the title screen music I had access to the entire SID chip," he explains.

There were other possible approaches. "You could have two channels for music and one for sound effects – I think *Comic Bakery* and *Yie-Ar Kung Fu* may have done that," he says. But there was one option Martin didn't like.

"A hybrid approach was *Rambo* where you had three channels of music, but as soon as a sound effect wanted to play, the music lost one of its channels. This approach was less than desirable because nobody got what they wanted!"

[C64] Martin was able to make full use of the SID chip for music when the actual game wasn't being played.

» [Amiga] Anco struck a deal for *Tip Off* conversions with Imagineer during development of the Amiga original.

» [SNES] *Super Kick Off* was an early success story for the newv-look Enigma Variations.

ENIGMATIC EXCAVATIONS

GAMES ARE OFTEN CANCELLED, AND THIS WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE IN THOSE TURBULENT EARLY YEARS OF THE UK VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY. MOST DEVELOPERS WOULD EXPERIENCE A FEW, BUT ENIGMA VARIATIONS AND THE OWNERS' SUBSEQUENT COMPANIES HAD MORE THAN THEIR FAIR SHARE. IT'S TIME TO DISCOVER WHY

WORDS BY RICHARD C HEWISON

DARREN MELBOURNE

Darren has continued to work in the games industry and has had several high-profile roles, founding or cofounding numerous development studios.

Darren Melbourne became studio development director, and head of production at Enigma Variations in Harrogate in late-1992. Mark Greenshields was the owner and main programmer. Both knew that the company had to adapt to a rapidly changing industry. A deal was struck with Anil Gupta at Anco, which led to Nintendo console conversions for the Tokyo-based company Imagineer. "I'd known Anil back in the early eighties, when he was running a computer shop down in Dartford called Anirog," says Darren. "Unfortunately, his business partner Roger died in a car crash and the company changed to Anco afterwards."

Imagineer wanted NES and Game Boy conversions of *Kick Off 2*. "At that time Dino Dini had left Anco, and Steve Screech wouldn't have been able to take on the workload, so we were approached," recalls Darren. That opportunity gave Enigma the chance to enter the world of Nintendo. It received development kits from Imagineer under very stringent NDAs, and although the NES was 6502-based, Enigma had to learn the system. "We also had to buy EPROMs, EPROM burners, EPROM erasers… all equipment and processes that we weren't used to," explains Darren.

Mark Greenshields and Richard Naylor travelled to Japan to visit Nintendo, paid from Enigma's fees. "None of this was cheap, and so our £50,000 fee that had felt huge, suddenly wasn't," admits Darren. "Don't get me wrong. We will always be grateful to Anil for giving us the chance to get into console development, but we were very naïve when it came to how much that entry was going to cost us."

> "WE WILL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL TO ANIL FOR GIVING US THE CHANCE TO GET INTO CONSOLE DEVELOPMENT" DARREN MELBOURNE

When it came to the final development crunch, a further visit to Japan was needed. "Mark spent time with the QA and production teams in Japan to get the NES version finished, and he managed to reduce the required cartridge size using compression," says Darren. That reduction likely saved $400-$500,000 in total production costs, but if Enigma were expecting some gratitude, it wasn't forthcoming. "For that we got absolutely nothing. No bonus, not

LEE HAMMERTON

Lee 'Savoury SnaX' Hammerton-Walsh is a software engineer and games industry veteran. His free time is spent on various engineering hobbies, one of which is emulating old hardware.

» [NES] Despite Enigma's experience in football conversions, Sony dropped the ball for *Sensible Soccer*.

» [SNES] *Chaos Drop: Quest For The Dark Stone* would radically change before it got a release.

» [SNES] EA's *Bulls Vs Blazers* effectively killed off Enigma's SNES conversion of *Tip Off* early on.

even a thank you," says Darren. All three *Kick Off* conversions were completed and delivered on time. So far so good, but the comparatively low fees Enigma was being paid meant it never had enough money to make a profit or plan its next steps.

Focus then shifted to Anco's 16-bit basketball game *Tip Off*. The original versions had been written by Steve Screech in 1991. The Game Boy version was started by Fred O'Rourke and completed by Andrew Bowen. Mark Greenshields started the NES version in June '92, but despite it being completed in under four months, Imagineer cancelled the project. "It was frustrating because it was in the testing phase, ready to go but the market had since moved on to the SNES," admits Darren. Having the game cancelled was a huge setback, but Enigma didn't have the luxury of time on its side. It had to crack on with the SNES version.

"Unfortunately for us, the SNES version was also dropped after we visited CES in Chicago and saw *Bulls Vs Blazers* on the SNES," recalls Darren. "There was nothing wrong with our attempt, but it looked quite basic compared to EA's game, which looked amazing. It would have been wasted development time to complete it."

Darren paid Gremlin Graphics a visit in Sheffield, and Ian Stewart offered them the job of converting the Nigel Mansell licensed F1 arcade racing game to the Commodore 64. The project was perceived as a quick and easy task thanks to programmer Andrew Bowen's previous work on converting *Continental Circus* for The Sales Curve on the same platform. "Gremlin weren't going to do a C64 conversion," explains Darren. "But there was enough of a perceived demand, so we got the job. Unfortunately, we weren't quick enough. All the road routines were done, and it was looking great but before we could get to the alpha stage, Gremlin decided to pull the plug." Enigma's conversion was maybe six weeks away from completion, but unlike the ZX Spectrum and Amstrad CPC versions, the Commodore version never crossed the finishing line.

The sliding block puzzle game *Splitz* was produced for Imagineer on the Game Boy, but such was the precarious position it found itself in, Enigma were constantly operating under a hand-to-mouth existence. Just before *Tip Off* ▶

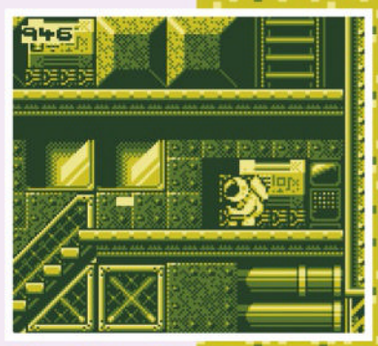
LESSONS LEARNED

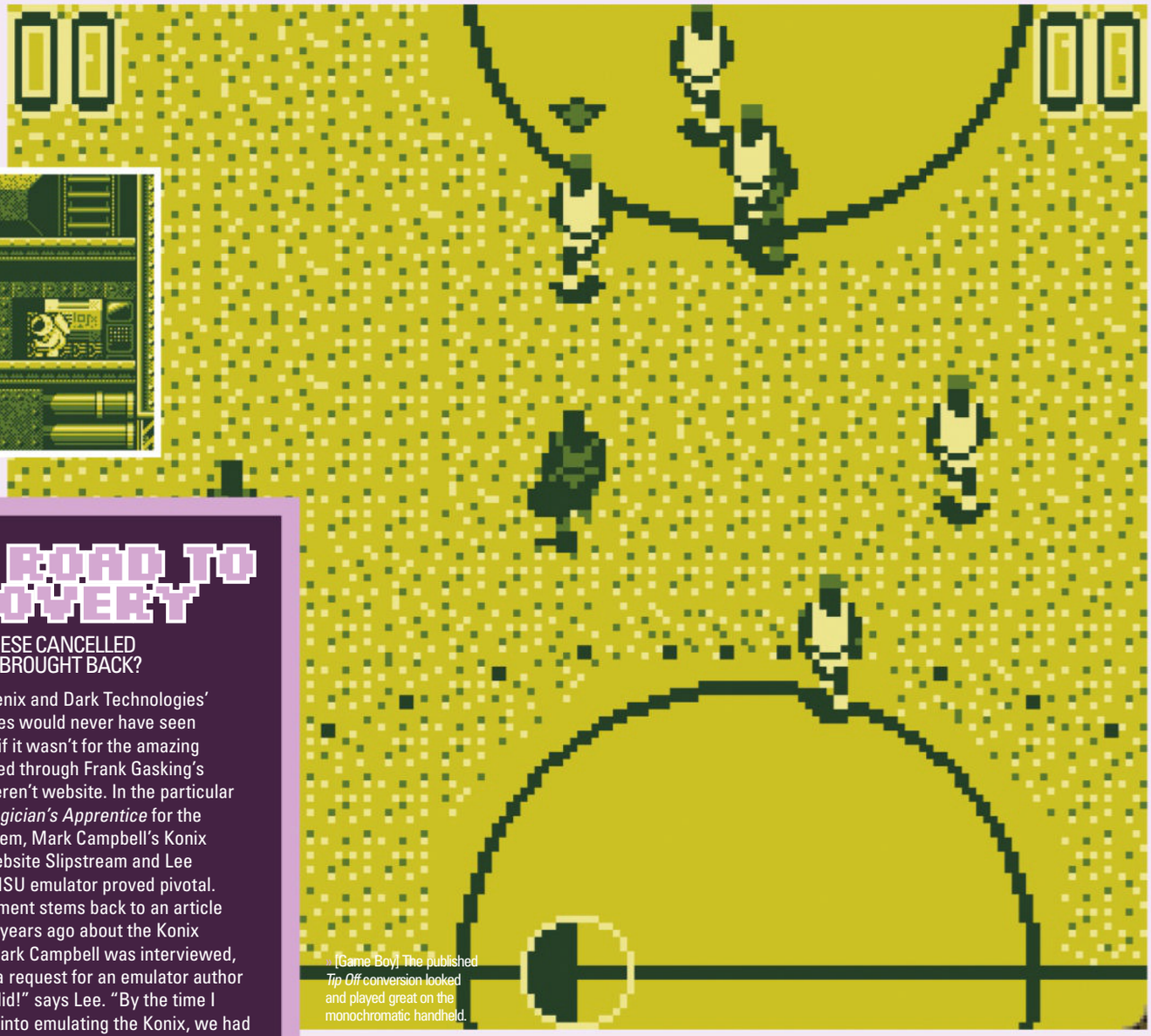
WHAT COULD ENIGMA VARIATIONS HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY?

There's a number of things that Enigma Variations could have done so lets look at them here. Creating more original IP would most likely have helped. After all, original IP earned higher and more regular royalty payments compared to conversions. Successful IP would have also produced additional conversions, bringing in even more income for the team. A better understanding of the market could have helped too. Researching future hardware trends and fellow developer fees would have made Enigma more competitive. An agent would have taken a percentage, but their extensive industry connections and knowledge would have likely produced more lucrative deals.

Agreeing on work beforehand could have helped, as ensuring that the work description was not ambiguous would have given Enigma a stronger position to get additional work appropriately compensated for. Any deviation from either side on the contract should have been agreed in writing in advance of any additional work starting. Staying away from old hardware could have helped too, as older hardware meant reduced funding and a lower priority status. Enigma shouldn't have agreed to multiple legacy projects at the expense of newer hardware or its own IP. Another thing to consider would have been spreading the load by signing with multiple publishers, which would have reduced risk and increased Enigma's industry connections. Finally, keeping a trained eye on income and expenditure and foreseeing shortfalls would have given Enigma a better insight into the financial health of its company and allowed it to plan ahead.

» [Game Boy] *Alien Olympics* is one of Enigma's games that did make it to market.





» [Game Boy] The published *Tip Off* conversion looked and played great on the monochromatic handheld.

THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

HOW HAVE THESE CANCELLED GAMES BEEN BROUGHT BACK?

Enigma, Phoenix and Dark Technologies' unfinished games would never have seen the light of day if it wasn't for the amazing work coordinated through Frank Gasking's Games That Weren't website. In the particular case of *The Magician's Apprentice* for the Konix Multisystem, Mark Campbell's Konix Multisystem website Slipstream and Lee Hammerton's MSU emulator proved pivotal.

"My involvement stems back to an article in **Retro Gamer** years ago about the Konix Multisystem. Mark Campbell was interviewed, and he put out a request for an emulator author to step in, so I did!" says Lee. "By the time I started looking into emulating the Konix, we had access to some documentation and some MSU era source code, so that's where I started."

A decade later, Frank reached out to Mark Campbell, as Mark Greenshields had passed on disks containing source code for *The Magician's Apprentice* for preservation. The game didn't run on the emulator, so Mark passed the files over to Lee to investigate further.

"I did a live stream of the recovery, which came down to adding a few missing features which other MSU titles didn't use," says Lee. "There are still issues, but it works, and it's nice to recover one more title."

▶ was dropped, Enigma started converting the seminal god game *Populous* to the NES and Game Boy for EA.

"Andrew Bowen (Roo) worked on *Populous* for the NES," says Darren. "He was amazing and could write natively in any of the required languages of the time and could do line-by-line conversions." It was late-October 1992 and Enigma's Game Boy version of *Populous* by Fred O'Rourke was finished. The NES was also nearly finished, waiting for final approval from EA and more significantly, Bullfrog. "I've always considered the NES conversion to be the highlight of my production career," says Darren. However, the NES conversion was soon in doubt. "Peter Molyneux wanted the NES conversion to be different from the 16-bit originals, something never previously discussed or negotiated, and much of what he was asking for couldn't be done on the NES," admits Darren. "Writing new code was also going to add another 6-8 weeks to the schedule, and Anil refused to get involved. We said we needed more money to do it, and Imagineer refused."

Enigma was in a tight spot. It needed the completion payments on *Populous* NES. Every penny counted. Unfortunately, the development delays and the perceived problems led to the NES conversion being cancelled by Imagineer, and with it went the entire working relationship. Another consequence was Mark Greenshield's original SNES arcade game *Mechanoids 2* for Imagineer also bit the dust. "*Mechanoids 2* was a *Street Fighter*-style game but in a *Double Dragon*-style world," says Darren. "We were due a $3 per unit royalty and $100,000 with Imagineer, so it would have been a ground-breaking amount for us."

Another original SNES game that Enigma had in the pipeline was a platformer called *Chaos Drop: Quest For The Dark Stone*. "We created some incredible graphics for it," enthuses Darren. "We took it to the Winter CES in Las Vegas in early 1993 and showed the first level to everybody. Taito and others were interested, but we had no money and to continue to develop something without a publisher was difficult."

However, a chance encounter at CES with a new UK company gave Mark and Darren an opportunity. "We met Michael Baxter who

» [SNES] *Mechanoids 2* was the victim of the fallout between Enigma and Imagineer.

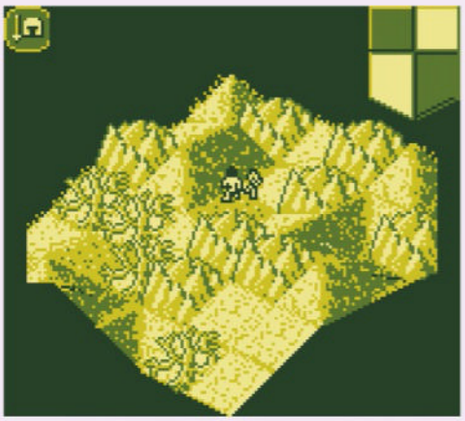
was working for MSU, and he was very excited by *Chaos Drop*, but he really didn't like the title." MSU was a UK company that rose from the still smouldering ashes of the Konix Multisystem, first touted in the late-Eighties by the UK joystick manufacturer. By the early Nineties MSU was preparing to relaunch the hardware, and Enigma had the chance to have one of the new console's launch titles with its retitled game *The Magician's Apprentice*.

> "IT WOULD HAVE BEEN WASTED DEVELOPMENT TIME TO COMPLETE IT" DARREN MELBOURNE

Less than a month after CES an agreement was struck with MSU to redevelop the game as a Multisystem title. However, the eventual deal wasn't what Enigma needed. "We had a call confirming everything was going ahead, and we were asked if we could start as soon as possible," says Darren. "MSU offered us £25,000 and a £5,000 signing fee. We knew we couldn't do it for that amount, but we were facing the usual financial dilemmas."

Promised development kits never appeared, so Enigma developed the game on the PC. "I'm proud to say that we finished it within three months, and I think we were the first completed Multisystem game. Jeff Minter's *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* was I believe a close second, but I don't think he finalised it, whilst we were at the mastering stage," reveals Darren. Unfortunately, MSU had its own problems, and so Enigma never received its final payment and neither the game nor the hardware ever appeared.

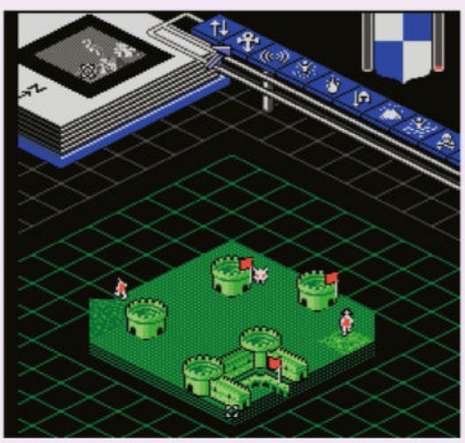
Nobody would have blamed Enigma for calling it a day at this point in its history. With so many unfinished projects littering its CV, the team's few solid releases were not bringing in enough money. Darren realised that Enigma was seriously being undervalued and underpaid. "I had a meeting with Richard Kay of Software Creations, and Fergus McNeil of Probe and it transpired during their conversations that we were being paid around a tenth of what they were charging for conversions to 8-bit and 16-bit consoles. That just illustrated how incredibly, stupidly naïve we were back then," says Darren with regret. ▶



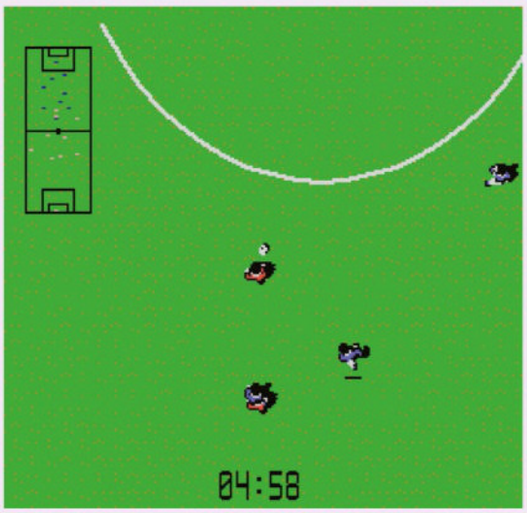
» [Game Boy] Getting *Populous* onto the Game Boy was an impressive feat of software engineering by Enigma.

» [Amiga] *Alien Olympics* was cancelled long before the conversion could be finished.

» [C64] The *Nigel Mansell* conversion stalled because that computer's race was finally run.



» [NES] Andrew (Roo) Bowen's NES conversion of *Populous* deserved a release, but the gods were not feeling benevolent.



» [NES] Squeezing *Kick Off 2* onto the NES taught Enigma a costly lesson.

» [SNES] *Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday* was one of many titles that did get a release.

Hot yet ready to pack it in, Enigma quickly moved on. "We wrote NES and Game Boy conversions of *The Addams Family* for Ocean," adds Darren. "Colin Gordon was our producer. We needed him to tell us which bits we could chop out of the game as we had a problem fitting a SNES design into a NES cartridge. Unfortunately, one of Colin's other projects for Ocean was the *Comic Relief* game, and that became all consuming. It took three months before we could show him what we'd done, and by then we'd converted the entire game. Unfortunately, whilst we had spent those three months constructively, we weren't getting paid anymore for finding a way to squeeze it all in."

Another Nintendo Game Boy title that Enigma programmer Stephen Hey jumped on was *Dr Franken 3* for Elite Systems. Reusing some of the work done for *The Addams Family*, the game was a curious platformer with adventure elements and the player character moving around in a spacesuit. Regrettably, it was never finished or released for reasons long since forgotten.

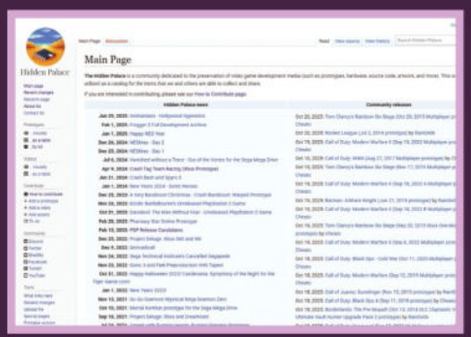
Darren knew people at Renegade, and having already produced *Kick Off* conversions for the NES, Game Boy and SNES, Enigma grabbed the chance to convert *Sensible Soccer* to the Game Boy and NES for Renegade and Sony Imagesoft. It was given a dump of the game's 68000 source code from the 16-bit versions and left to it. History then repeated itself. The Game Boy version was finished and released, but Renegade lost faith in the NES conversion and cancelled it soon afterwards. All was not lost though. Virgin came through with a conversion job, getting the hugely successful *The Lion King* onto the NES and Game Boy. A format combo that Enigma were now very familiar with.

A *Porky Pig* licence on the SNES was completed for Sunsoft, but Enigma Variations finally succumbed in 1994, and Phoenix Interactive Entertainment was formed out of necessity. Phoenix was short-lived and was created to finish off projects that Enigma had left dangling. It was felt important to do this, even though from a purely financial viewpoint it didn't earn the company much money. "Mark was disillusioned. We had taken a bit of a battering, and we couldn't keep going," admits Darren. "I kept a small contingent on to finish *Porky Pig*, and *The Lion King*."

> "THAT JUST ILLUSTRATED HOW INCREDIBLY, STUPIDLY NAÏVE WE WERE BACK THEN"
> DARREN MELBOURNE

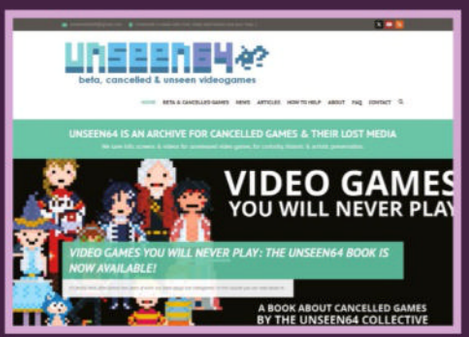
After Phoenix came Dark Technologies, so named using 'Da' from Darren and 'rk' from Mark. Dark Technologies was different. It was a fresh start. No more conversion work. No more cheap deals, and a small compact team. Unfortunately, *The Lion King* conversions weren't completed when Phoenix Interactive Entertainment also succumbed. Their first task under the new company was therefore to finish *The Lion King* and write *Alien Olympics*. The former was a huge movie-licensed game, and the latter was the team's own original IP. "Our NES and Game Boy versions of *The Lion King* were based on

THAT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM



HIDDEN PALACE
HIDDENPALACE.ORG

■ Hidden Palace has been around since 2006 and represents a community of dedicated people who strive to preserve as much videogame development material as possible, before the original physical media deteriorates. The list of preserved titles is huge and covers a multitude of platforms.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A BOOK ABOUT CANCELLED GAMES BY THE UNSEEN64 COLLECTIVE

UNSEEN64
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■ Born in 2001, a group of passionate Italian gamers decided to try and find and archive prototypes and unreleased games for fun. This pet project grew over the years, and is now a large resource of articles, videos and some lost media for 16-bit platforms and beyond.

Games That Weren't
Preserving Cancelled & Unreleased Video Game History Since 1999
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40 years of unreleased video games
Latest News and Posts
Famous Five: Five on a Treasure Island V1
1991 Enigma Variations

GAMES THAT WEREN'T
GAMESTHATWEREN'T.COM

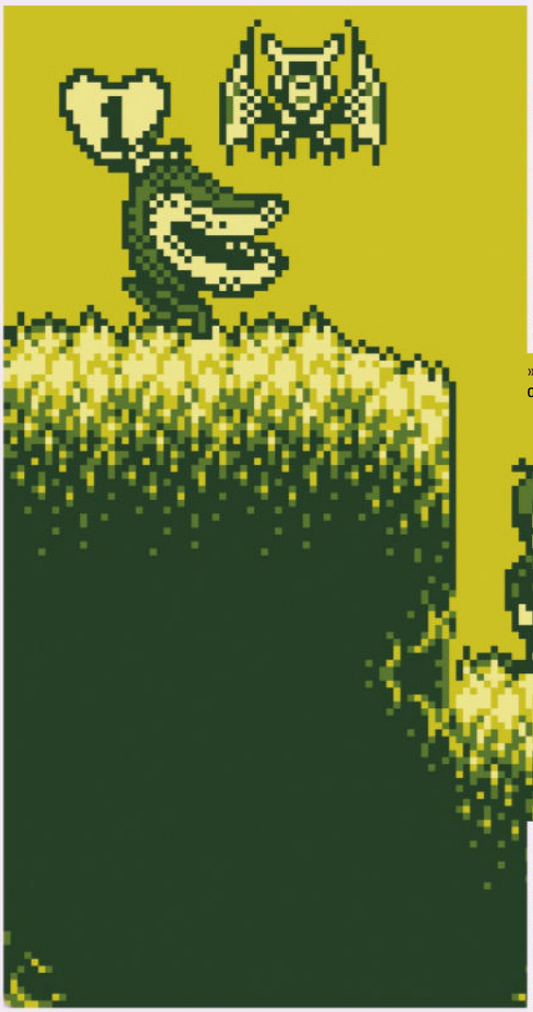
■ Originally started by Frank Gasking in 1999 as a website covering lost Commodore 64 games, his hobbyist project eventually grew into a site that covers any format. Updates are typically weekly, and there are many downloads available.

the SNES original," explains Darren. "We were overrunning due to trying to cram it all in, yet again. We had to redesign and rebuild big chunks of it, and we fell a month behind schedule. We had a $1 per unit royalty riding on completion, but these were now legacy products. Virgin offered us an additional £10,000 to finish, but that included buying out the royalty deal."

Darren and Mark reluctantly accepted the offer, only to later learn that the combined sales figures for the conversions allegedly totalled over 1.2 million units. The royalties earned would have been enormous. Enigma then worked with Ocean Software to publish its original game design *Alien Olympics* for consoles. The Nintendo Game Boy version was duly released, and work began on the Sega Game Gear handheld. Meanwhile, with Ocean showing no interest in home-computer versions, Mindscape International UK picked up the Amiga and PC rights.

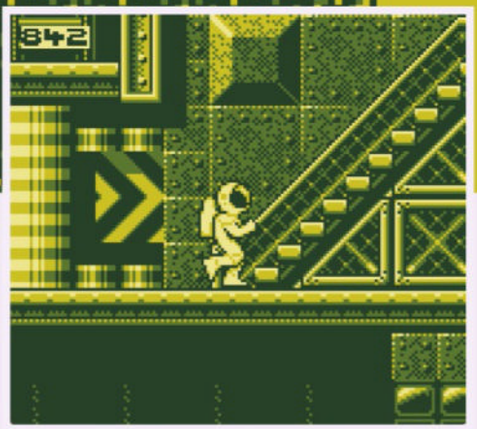
The PC version of *Alien Olympics* was published in 1995 with the bonus platform game *The Magician's Apprentice*, finally giving that title a release. Work had started on the Amiga version of *Alien Olympics* but internal problems at Mindscape and the fading of the Commodore Amiga led to that version being dropped before the PC version was released. Ocean then pulled out of the Sega Game Gear market, also signalling a less than enigmatic end for Darren and Mark's development partnerships.

Richard C Hewison tested NES *Sensible Soccer,* wrote the *Sensible Soccer* (Game Boy) and *Alien Olympics* (PC) manuals.



» [Game Boy] Enigma's *The Addams Family 2* proved to be its final licensed Game Boy conversion.

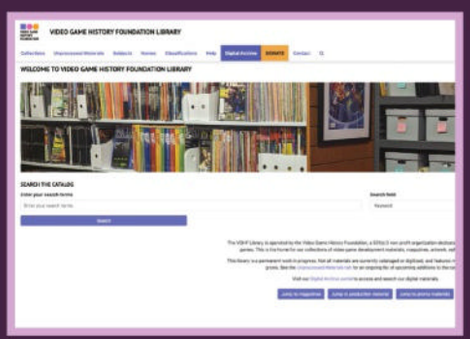
» [NES] Enigma went above and beyond for Ocean on its NES *Addams Family 2* conversion.



» [Game Boy] The platformer *Dr Franken 3* became Enigma's first Game Boy title to be cancelled.

» [Game Boy] *Blitz* was the only original IP game that Enigma had published by Imagineer.

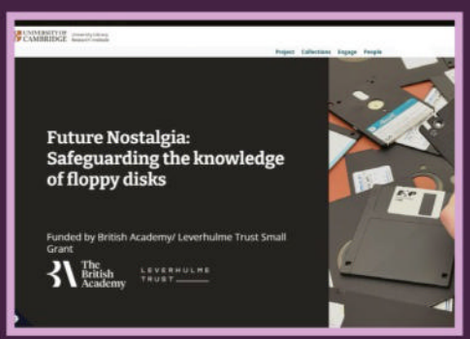
THE WEBSITES THAT HAVE PRESERVED LOST GAMES AND OLD MEDIA



VIDEOGAME HISTORY FOUNDATION

ARCHIVE.GAMEHISTORY.ORG

The VGHF does all sorts of important preservation work from dumping ROMs and buying items to restore, to cataloguing magazines, retailer catalogues and much more. It's even possible to find documented work from the likes of Cyan and Craig Stitt.


Future Nostalgia:
Safeguarding the knowledge of floppy disks
Funded by British Academy/ Leverhulme Trust Small Grant
The British Academy
LEVERHULME TRUST

FUTURE-NOSTALGIA

LIB.CAM.AC.UK/FUTURE-NOSTALGIA

The University Of Cambridge's Library Research Institute has recently revealed its Future Nostalgia project to educate people to archive floppy disks, concentrating on the Shugart interface commonly used for home computing. Whilst not game specific, it's still an interesting project worth engaging with.

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Contra: Hard Corps

THAT'S NOT MY NAME

» RETROREVIVAL

» MEGA DRIVE » 1994 » KONAMI

As a rule of thumb, we always use the UK name of a game in the magazine. After all, that's the name that the vast majority of our readers will recognise. So you've probably already clocked that *Contra: Hard Corps* shouldn't be the title for this particular Retro Revival. That's completely on me.

It's not to be annoying or difficult, the name *Contra* has just been burned into my brain from a very young age and I've never been able to call the series anything else. "Ah, but what about the fact that *Contra* was called *Gryzor* over here," I hear you say. It's a fair cop, but due to importing games from the very impressionable age of 16, it's the name *Contra* and not *Probotector* or *Gryzor* that's always stuck with me as the 'only' name of this particular series and it's the one that inevitably always makes its way into the mag whenever the series is mentioned.

In fact, the name *Probotector* used to be the butt of various jokes in my circle of import-loving friends at the time, because it meant that whoever was mentioning it was playing a version of *Contra* that had those naff-looking robots in it, so they clearly needed to be teased about it. That's obviously a very childish attitude to take, particularly towards those who might not have even known that a different version of the game existed with humans instead of robots, but hey, we all do mean or stupid things when we're young.

The fact of the matter is, regardless of how you might refer to this game, it remains an incredibly enjoyable run-and-gun. Granted, the PAL version has the same optimisation issues that many games of the era had, but it's still an intense blaster, with excellent boss fights, banging music and highly impressive visuals. Sadly, it's also quite the expensive game to own nowadays, regardless of what it's called, so if you can, grab M2's excellent *Contra Anniversary Collection* and play it on there, as it not only features both versions of the game, but lets you play *Probotector* at 60Hz as well. Now you can pretty much experience it just as I did back in the day. ✱

ULTIMATE GUIDE

QuackShot

STARRING Donald Duck

THERE ONCE WAS A TIME, WHEN GAMES BASED ON FAMOUS DISNEY PROPERTIES WERE ALMOST GUARANTEED HITS – THAT ESPECIALLY GOES FOR GAMES MADE BY SEGA UNDER THE DIRECTION OF EMIKO YAMAMOTO. QUACKSHOT STARRING DONALD DUCK WAS MAYBE HER MOST AMBITIOUS WORK FOR THE 16-BIT CONSOLE

WORDS BY THOMAS NICKEL

IN THE KNOW

- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **DEVELOPER:** SEGA
- **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE
- **RELEASED:** 1991
- **GENRE:** ACTION ADVENTURE

In the days before Sonic, Sega tried many things to establish an actual rival to Nintendo's Mario – and one of the most promising approaches was a licensing deal with Disney. The first game to come out of this agreement was *Castle Of Illusion Starring Mickey Mouse*, a well-made Mega Drive platformer released in 1990 and directed by newcomer Emiko Yamamoto.

With its beautiful graphics, many clever ideas and precise controls, Yamamoto and her team proved that Sega could absolutely produce excellent, console-style platformers that didn't need to fear comparison to Nintendo's output. But instead of going for a straight sequel, which put the famous mouse through another gauntlet of stages, the team went with the second big name in Disney's line-up. As a result, the ever unlucky Donald Duck and his famously short temper would star in Sega's second 16-bit Disney-game, *QuackShot Starring Donald Duck*.

For inspiration, Yamomoto and her team looked at some new sources. While *Castle Of Illusion* took a lot of inspiration from fairy tales and early classic Disney movies such as *Snow White* and others, *QuackShot* has more in common with the adventurous tone of more modern works. Comics by Carl Barks and Don Rosa, the 1987 TV show *DuckTales* and European, mostly Italian, Disney comics seem to have had a major influence on the Japanese development team – and the same goes of course for George Lucas' and Steven Spielberg's popular *Indiana Jones* movies.

» [Mega Drive] A dark-blue sky and a giant moon make the Viking Ship one of the game's most striking locations.

Instead of saving an abducted loved one, Donald goes on a globe-spanning treasure hunt. After finding a mysterious map pointing to the treasure of the legendary King Garuzia in Uncle Scrooge's study, Donald dons a shirt, a backpack and a fedora, grabs a gun with an unlimited supply of plungers and goes for it. His nephews Huey, Dewey and Louie take care of transportation, they deliver Donald at various exciting locations and pick him up again as soon as he requests transport after planting a flag at the midpoint of most stages.

After Mickey explored *Castle Of Illusion* in a rather linear, straight-forward manner, Donald's spelunking is a surprisingly non-linear affair. At the beginning, the map shows three locations: Duckburg, Mexico and Transylvania. This gives intrepid adventurers a good opportunity to learn the ropes. After reaching the midpoint of Duckburg, a high wall prevents any further progress. However, after reaching the pyramid in Mexico, Donald learns of a team of explorers

» [Mega Drive] After consuming five spicy peppers, Donald's temper finally gets the better of him.

Around The World With Donald

THE MANY LOCATIONS VISITED IN QUACKSHOT

Duckburg

Donald starts exploring his hometown Duckburg on the streets. But after acquiring the Red Plunger, he climbs up to the rooftops and even engages in some spectacular and rather daring zip line-based shenanigans in order to meet his inventor friend Gyro Gearloose and get another useful tool.

Mexico

Don't let the beautiful sunset fool you! With some bottomless pits and moving platforms, Mexico can be quite dangerous. Especially when Donald enters the pyramid: spikes, fire traps and even some puzzles make you wonder how Goofy made his way to the end totally unscathed…

Transylvania

Dark swamps and Dracula's castle mark the end of the first part of the adventure: Donald can only enter the keep after he has found all the tools in Duckburg and Mexico. The castle is full of traps, ghosts and extended underwater passages and at the end, a boss awaits!

Maharajah

Snake charmers and Pete's armed henchmen try to prevent Donald from entering the palace. Inside, our hero finds a huge labyrinth with lots and lots of doors and another boss at the end: a ferocious tiger leaps around and spews fire at poor Donald!

Egypt

Why leave it at one pyramid when you can have two of them? After crossing the desert, Donald explores the second pyramid and is almost crushed in a dastardly trap: Goofy's Strange Note finally becomes useful. A wild mine-cart ride marks the end of this stage.

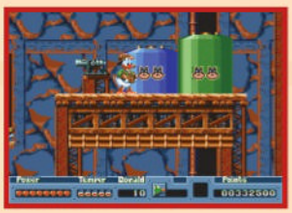
South Pole

Huge orcas and shiny seals are hungry for duck, and a plunge into the icy waters isn't advisable either. Still, Donald needs to cross the frozen wastelands, waters and caves in order to find not one, but actually two lost Viking artefacts.

Viking Ship

Annoying ghosts have taken over a large, wooden Viking vessel and getting them to leave is more complicated than expected, especially as the ship's owner lost the key to the hold. With dark-blue skies and hauntingly beautiful music, this stage is especially striking.

Hideout



Before reaching Pete's trap-ridden hideout, Donald has to cross a wild jungle. With all the expensive personnel, tech and machines present, one does wonder why Pete and his gang even need King Garuzia's treasure anymore. Donald's victory opens the path to the grand finale.

The Island

Deep jungles, vast and mysterious ruins, an invisible bridge and an ancient guardian make sure reaching the great treasure is anything but easy – and the game's final stages also shows that the designers took some careful notes when watching the third *Indiana Jones* movie!

that just happened to return to Duckburg and might have something for our hero.

And indeed, a friendly, old researcher hands Donald the Hero Key which he promptly uses to open the pyramid, only to find his old friend Goofy inside who hands him a Strange Note and a Red Plunger – all of a sudden, that high wall in Duckburg becomes very climbable!

Admittedly the design of *QuackShot* isn't as intricate and clever as something like *Metroid* or *Wonder Boy*. Indeed, some events seem rather contrived – Goofy awaiting Donald in the trap-filled, locked pyramid is the best example here – but it's 1991 and suspension of disbelief is still a thing. As a result, *QuackShot* becomes a wonderful bridge for young players slowly transitioning from linear, action-filled platformers to something that requires a more cerebral approach.

That especially holds true once the game really opens up: after defeating Dracula, the first real boss, the world map expands a lot and offers another four new, even more exciting locations: Egypt, the India-inspired Maharajah, a haunted Viking ship and the South Pole perfectly fit the globe-trotting tone of Donald's great adventure.

The structure remains familiar. Many stages require Donald to get keys or other items from different locations to progress. There's a wide array of challenges and setpieces from labyrinths to mine-cart rides, switch-based puzzles and crushing ceilings. And just when Donald and the player think the end is in sight, arch-nemesis Pete, whose gang has hounded Donald through all of the previous stages, kidnaps Donald's nephews and ransoms them for the trinket detailing the actual path to King Garuzia's treasure. So the final two stages ramp up the drama once more and have Donald first infiltrate Pete's secret base and finally explore the hidden island and face a final guardian before claiming… well, we don't want to spoil the ending here.

Duck Tales

FURTHER ADVENTURES OF DONALD DUCK

THE LUCKY DIME CAPER STARRING DONALD DUCK

■ 1991 was a busy year for Donald – besides starring in *QuackShot*, he travelled the world in this platformer for the Master System and Game Gear. Sporting his classic sailor outfit, a hammer or throwing discs, Donald hunts down Magica De Spell to rescue his nephews and retrieve Uncle Scrooge's lucky dime.

DEEP DUCK TROUBLE STARRING DONALD DUCK

■ To help Uncle Scrooge get rid of a pesky curse, Donald travels across an island on the search for treasure. This late, but fun 8-bit platformer was developed by Aspect and released in late-1993 and early 1994 for the Game Gear and Master System. The latter version fetches a rather hefty price today.

MAUI MALLARD IN COLD SHADOW

■ This PC/Mega Drive platformer, made in 1995 by Disney Interactive and later also ported to the SNES and Game Boy, has Donald starring as Maui Mallard – or as the powerful, stick-wielding Cold Shadow. The game sports some of the best pixel art of the 16-bit era and has long, complex levels.

DONALD DUCK: QUACK ATTACK

■ Ubisoft released eight versions for the PlayStation, PS2, Dreamcast, N64, PC, Game Boy Colour, Game Boy Advance and GameCube between 2000 and 2002. While they all share some common elements, there's a lot of differences, the GBC game even feels like an unofficial sequel to Sega's *The Lucky Dime Caper*.

If *Castle Of Illusion* was Sega's proof that it really can do great console-style platformers, *QuackShot* really shows its creators' ambition. The more open structure, the feeling of adventure and the completely revamped mechanics make *QuackShot* feel very different from its predecessor while delivering even higher production values. While Mickey mostly relied on the trusty old butt-bounce to dispose of enemies, Donald goes for more modern weaponry. Granted, our hero is carrying a gun, but instead of firing bullets, he shoots popcorn, bubblegum and plungers! The plungers are actually a real innovation. While in their first iteration, they simply stun enemies for a short amount of time, after the first upgrade, they stick to pretty much every wall and allow Donald to go upwards, making the game a much more vertical affair than its contemporaries.

And of course Donald's famous temper is also represented here: in some levels, Donald finds spicy peppers: consuming five of those sends him into an almost berserker-like rage. He zips through the levels, making short work of any enemy stupid enough to stand in his way. This is, however, actually one of the game's weaker aspects – despite getting its own interface window, Donald's pepper-induced rage can only be triggered in a few levels where the designers intentionally placed just the right number of spicy vegetables – the mechanic feels a bit under-utilised and doesn't live up to its actual potential – a small blemish on an otherwise excellent game.

» [Mega Drive] With the green plunger, Donald can cling on to enemies to cross wide chasms.

» [Mega Drive] The pyramid in Mexico isn't as empty as expected – guards bearing torches await Donald inside.

» [Mega Drive] A final call-back to *Indiana Jones*: the final boss is an ancient knight, twirling and throwing his sword around.

Technically, *QuackShot* still manages to wow today. Pixel artists Yonesan, Mika Nishida and art director Takashi Yuda worked wonders with the Mega Drive's four usable palettes of 16 colours each. The game features big, lovely animated sprites and detailed backgrounds with many beautiful colour choices that made *QuackShot* one of the best-looking Mega Drive games of 1991 – it really feels like playing a comic or a cartoon. Composer Shigenori Kamiya meanwhile gives each location some fitting tunes: from the happy-go-lucky Duckburg theme, to the gloomy music of Transylvania to the hauntingly beautiful sounds of the Viking Ship, *QuackShot* almost always excels – it's only a bit of a pity that the long-awaited final level doesn't get its own exciting theme, but simply reuses the music from the Mexican and the Egyptian pyramid stages.

QuackShot's reception at the time was overwhelmingly positive: *CVG* gave it a rating of 89/100, *MegaTech* went for an 82 and *Sega Pro* scored it 95/100. Surprisingly, the Japanese *Famitsu* was rather critical, all four editors awarded *QuackShot* a mediocre 6/10 each – but then the Mega Drive and its games were never too popular with its Japanese audience. It's also a bit sad that *QuackShot* was hardly ever rereleased. After coming back once in a Japan-exclusive *Sega Ages* double pack with *Castle Of Illusion*, there have been no ports or conversions for modern hardware. While both *Castle Of Illusion* and *World Of Illusion* found a spot on the excellent Mega Drive Mini in 2019, *QuackShot* had no collections, no release for Virtual Console, nothing since the Saturn rerelease of 1998. Here's hoping that Sega hasn't entirely forgotten about Donald's great, globe-trotting treasure hunt! ✱

A Duck's Inventory

THE MANY USEFUL ITEMS THAT YOU CAN USE IN QUACKSHOT

Yellow Plunger

Donald's first piece of equipment – an endless supply of yellow toilet plungers, fired out of a gun to stun unsuspecting foes.

Red Plunger

These plungers stick to almost every vertical surface and allow Donald to ascend steep walls.

Green Plunger

This plunger is far more situational than its red counterpart: it allows Donald to stick to flying enemies.

Popcorn-Gun

While popcorn ammo is limited, this shot has a wide spread and can take out enemies instead of stunning them.

Bubblegum

Bubblegum ammo is limited and slow, but very strong – so strong, that it can even remove some walls!

Hero Key

A friendly explorer in Duckburg holds the Hero Key and gladly hands it to Donald. It opens the pyramid in Mexico.

Strange Note

Who knows how Goofy ended up deep inside the Mexican pyramid, but his Strange Note will come in handy!

Sphinx Tear

The Sphinx Tear is Donald's reward for beating the tiger in the labyrinth. It's used to open the pyramid in Egypt.

Scepter of Ra

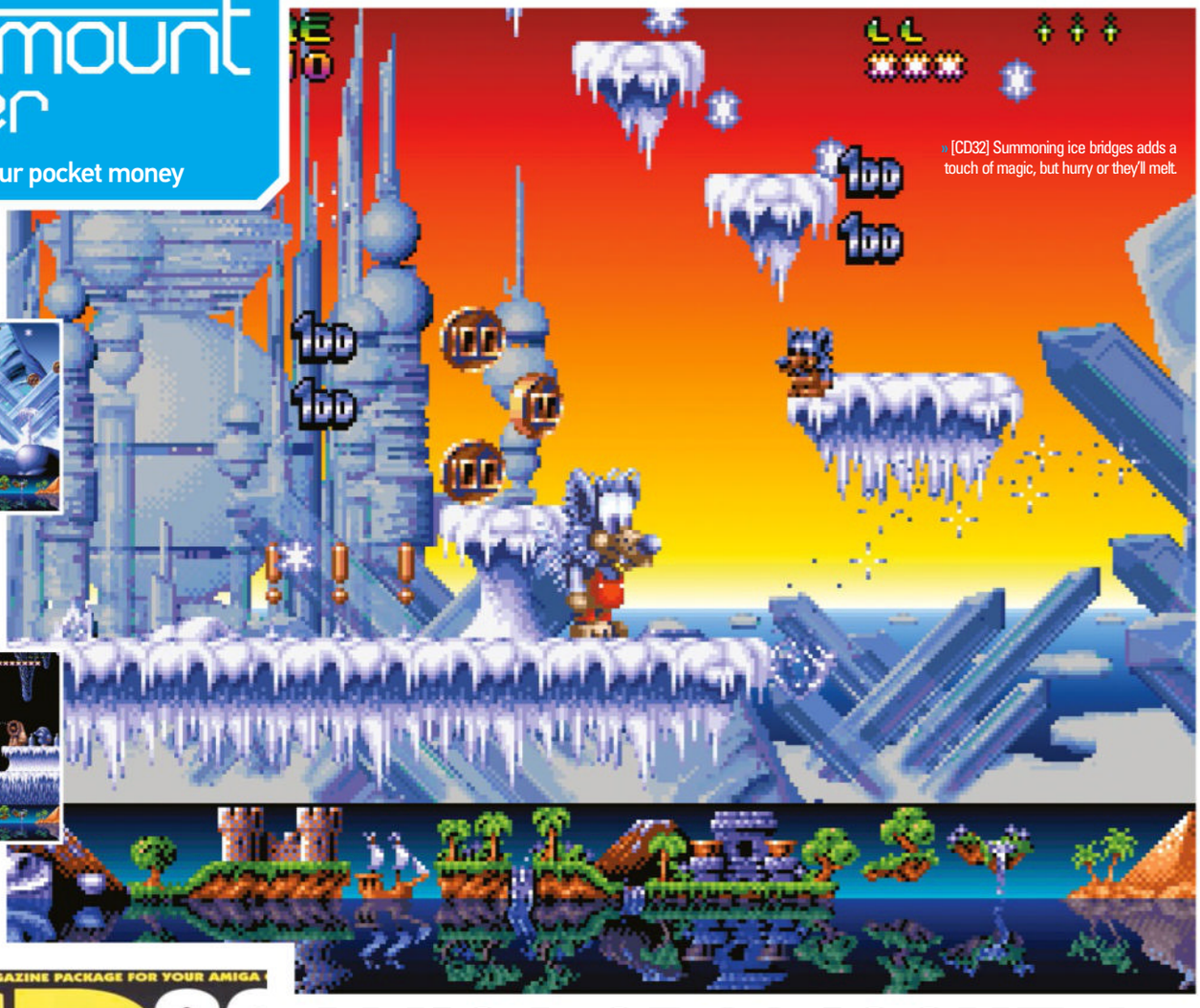
Deep within the Egyptian pyramid, Donald finds this treasure, which might help him melt a block of ice far south.

Viking Key

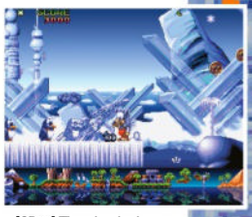
A Viking misplaced the key to his ship's hold. Donald needs to search the other side of the world to find it.

Viking Diary

This diary holds the secret of how to find the hidden island. Of course Donald's not the only one searching for it.

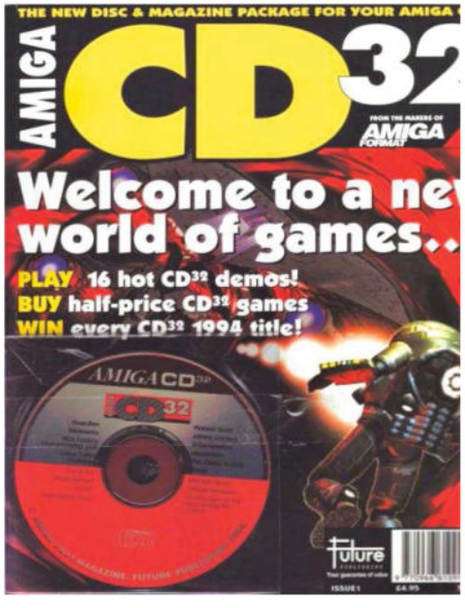


» [CD32] Summoning ice bridges adds a touch of magic, but hurry or they'll melt.



» [CD32] The clouds drop Snowflake Bombs if you shoot them a few times, but then they'll zap you with lightning.

» [CD32] Your puppy helper doubles your firepower and has to be one of the Amiga's cutest in-game companions.


THE NEW DISC & MAGAZINE PACKAGE FOR YOUR AMIGA
AMIGA CD32
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Future

AMIGA CD32 ISSUE 1

THE CD ERA PROMISED MUCH, BUT WHILE DEVELOPERS TOOK A WHILE TO MAKE GOOD USE OF THE FORMAT, COVERDISCS NAILED IT FROM THE START. FILLED WITH A BEWILDERING MIX OF DEMOS, GAMES AND MORE BESIDES, GAMERS HAD NEVER SEEN SO MUCH BOUNTY IN ONE PLACE

WORDS BY JAMES KONIK

THIS MONTH IN APRIL 1994

In 1994, for a brief moment in time, the CD32 felt like the future. Amiga owners were dreaming of a next-gen revival, with the CD32 promising AGA power and the vast storage space of CD. The system's first coverdiscs were spectacular, with the sheer breadth of CD content feeling revolutionary. Music, books and art all sat alongside oodles of games.

Sadly, by the end of April Commodore was bankrupt and the Amiga would fall by the wayside with it, its limited power no match for the soon to launch 5th generation consoles. It was over, but it had been fun while it lasted.

» [CD32] These skiers whizz by quickly, so make sure you freeze them in case they've got pieces of the key you're after.

THE MAIN EVENT: FIRE AND ICE DEMO

Created by developer Graftgold, *Fire And Ice*, is a delightful shooty platformer. You guide hero Cool Coyote around the levels, hunting pieces of the key which lets you reach the next stage. Assorted beasties bar your way, but you can spit ice-balls that freeze them for you to then shatter. You can also find extra weapons hidden in secret ice blocks.

Heavily enhanced, with CD audio and better graphics, the CD32 hosts the definitive version of the game, with coder Andrew Braybrook using the extra horsepower to sprinkle in even more magic. As well as doubling the game's framerate, there's extra parallax scrolling, more colours and enhanced fades as the game shifts beautifully from day to night and back again.

The demo gives you the fifth zone of the opening land, and it's not too tricky, but not too easy either. The level is a glorious wintery wonderland, and with snowflakes, snowballs, and the jangle of bells on the soundtrack, it's a very festive game, although it received an even more Christmassy makeover for *Amiga Power*'s December 1992 coverdisk.

The game is full of neat touches, from the cute puppies that follow you about and add to your firepower, to the Snowflake Smart Bomb, to the map reflections at the bottom of the screen. The frozen theme is baked into the levels as you

» [CD32] In the *Chaos Engine*, enemies come from all directions, so you'll need plenty of firepower to bring them down.

» [CD32] The new version of *Pinball Fantasies*' Partyland table really shows off the AGA palette.

conjure ice ladders and bridges to cross, which only last a short time before melting.

Musician Jason Page described the *Fire And Ice* CD sound as some of his best work, and this demo includes the fantastic, but rarely heard alternative title track that includes Graftgold artist (and future wife of Jason Page) Emma Cubberley on vocals. Exuberant, and full of fun, *Fire And Ice* is a classic piece of Amiga gaming.

PLAY THIS NEXT: WHERE TO START...

With 16 demos and nine public domain games to play, CD storage left gamers spoiled. *The Chaos Engine*, *Pinball Fantasies* and *Zool* all had AGA makeovers and there were more demos of *Lotus Trilogy*, *Nigel Mansell's Championship* and the quirky platformer, *Donk*. In the PD section, *Insectoids 2* was a superior *Galaga* clone by Acid's Mark Sibly, and there was also an excellent *Tetris* clone, a valiant AMOS graphic adventure and the lovable madness of *Mr Wobbly Leg*.

Experimental extras included an art gallery, three classic books and several music tracks. With the internet still a luxury all this seemed new and exciting, even if reading a book on the CD32 wasn't actually that appealing.

» [CD32] *Zool*'s backgrounds are spectacular and packed with colour, and your moves are as deadly as ever.

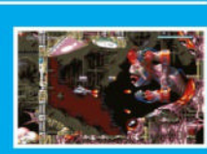
Covermount HIGHLIGHTS

THE BEST OF THE REST

MICROCOSM DEMO

■ The CD32's headline game looked spectacular in screenshots, but unfortunately just isn't very good. Essentially a poor man's *Space Harrier*, it's arguably the weakest thing on the disc, but the demo lets readers check it out and enjoy the snazzy intro.

DISPOSABLE HERO DEMO



■ *Disposable Hero* is a technically stunning, hard-as-nails shooter, by Dutch team Euphoria. The demo shows off the game's blood and technology aesthetic, and unusual weapons system. The brutal difficulty is tuned down on the CD32, making it the best version of this challenging shooter.

GUARDIAN DEMO

■ In *Guardian*, from Acid Software, you fly your ship around the landscape blasting aliens and protecting the humans they're hunting. It's like *Defender*, but in 3D, with power-ups, varied enemies and a mothership bringing reinforcements to the battle.

D/GENERATION DEMO

■ This is an isometric adventure where you encounter puzzles and deadly bio-weapons as you rise through the Genoq building. With its plot told through survivors and scattered messages, it feels ahead of its time in its coherence and singularity of vision.

SUPER SKIDMARKS DEMO

■ Acid's scrappy, boisterous racer brings the *Super Sprint* template up to date with slick 3D visuals and the demo's split-screen mode, which is multiplayer at its finest. It's anarchic madness, and the demo features a slightly different look to the final game.

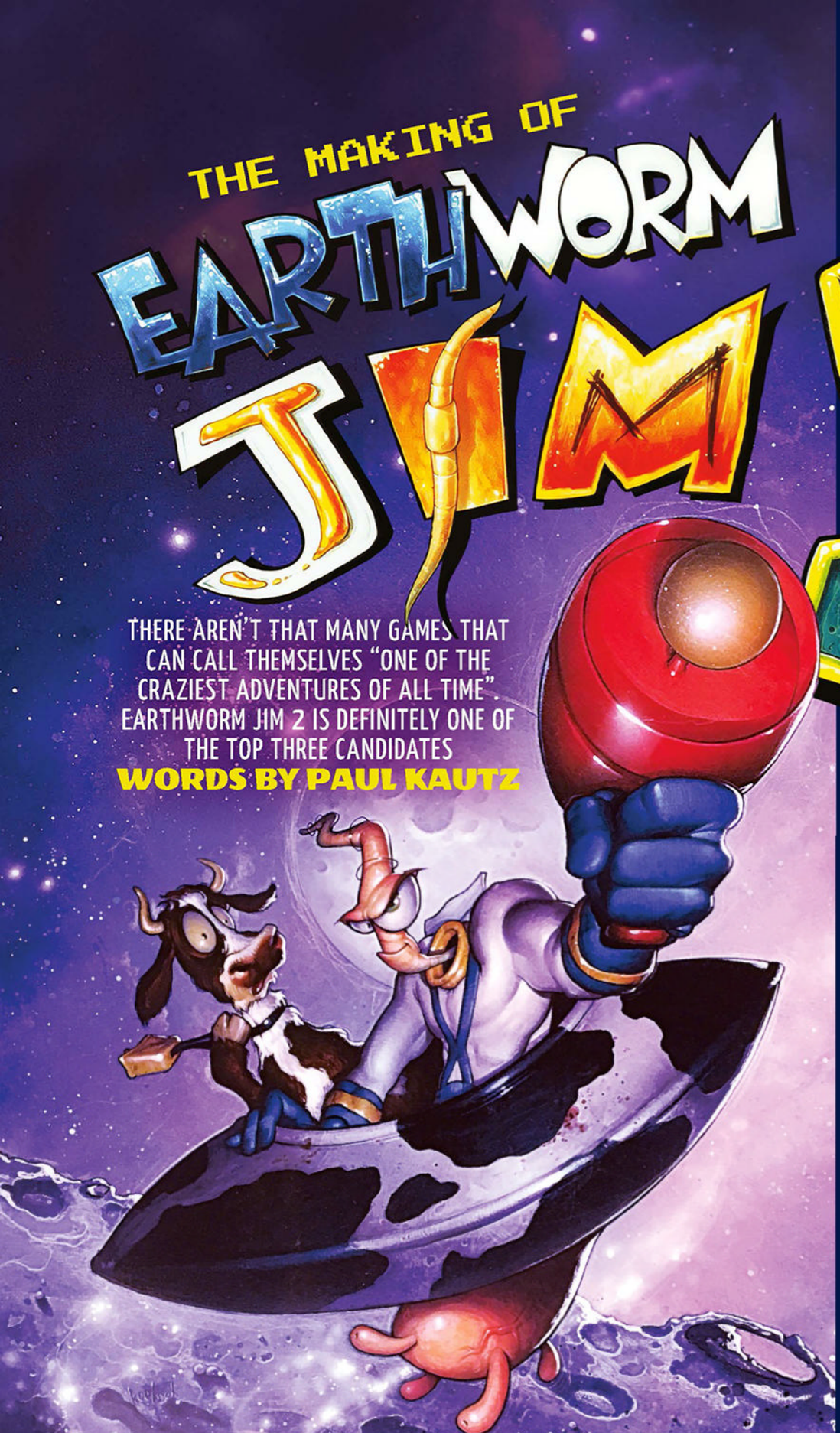
ALFRED CHICKEN DEMO

■ Developer Twilight's final game was this quirky platformer featuring the charismatic Alfred Chicken. You flap, you peck, you terrorise clockwork mice from above, jumping and soaring gracelessly in your relentless pursuit of diamonds and cheese.

THE MAKING OF EARTHWORM JIM 2

THERE AREN'T THAT MANY GAMES THAT CAN CALL THEMSELVES "ONE OF THE CRAZIEST ADVENTURES OF ALL TIME". EARTHWORM JIM 2 IS DEFINITELY ONE OF THE TOP THREE CANDIDATES

WORDS BY PAUL KAUTZ



Released in 1994, *Earthworm Jim* was dressed for success right from the start. The team that created it was largely made up of the same people around lead developer David Perry who had previously enjoyed huge success with titles such as *Cool Spot* and *Aladdin* (both 1993). After the success of *Aladdin*, however, David wanted to reap the rewards himself for a change and founded the company Shiny Entertainment together with some former Virgin Interactive colleagues.

Earthworm Jim, the young company's debut game, was released in October 1994 and turned out to be a resounding success, with its wacky level design, crazy cartoon humour and bizarre characters such as Psy-Crow, Princess What's-Her-Name, Evil The Cat, Professor Monkey-For-A-Head and, above all, Jim himself.

Work on *Earthworm Jim 2* began immediately after the release of the first instalment and its special edition. In hindsight, this was a mistake, as art director Nick Bruty tells us, "At the end of *Earthworm Jim 1*, we were dead. I looked at David and he looked terrible. Everybody was just done. That was one of the hardest couple of days of my life. I remember late one night when I went under my desk and I fell asleep and it seemed like only a second passed and then [animation director] Mike

» [PC] Psy-Crow kidnaps Princess What's-Her-Name, Jim has to rescue her. Madness ensues.

Dietz was there trying to wake me up with a hot cup of tea. But we still went directly into making *Earthworm Jim 2*. David just couldn't do the programming anymore, so Andy Astor took his place. And so I remember starting that game feeling pretty wiped out. On the first *Jim* game things were coming easy to me creatively. On *Jim 2*, I felt like I had to really push hard and I wasn't in a fun mood. Luckily though, we brought in a couple of new developers, like Steve Crow and Mark Lorenzen. And that helped a lot." Despite all the problems, *Earthworm Jim 2* was in the shops just in time for the holiday sales of 1995, and just like its predecessor, available on the Mega Drive and Super Nintendo first.

What's it all about? Well, the lovely Princess What's-Her-Name has been kidnapped by the oh-so-evil villain Psy-Crow and must now be freed. You know the drill. And just like in many other games from Shiny, cows play a very important role here too, both in the game itself and in the accompanying adverts. Something that, according to programmer Nick Jones, came naturally, "In our meetings, if somebody laughed at something it just got accepted. So I don't quite know how it got so crazy with the cows. It started off with the cow launch in *Earthworm Jim*, which sort of set the tone for where we were going to go. When we were at Virgin and we were doing *Aladdin*, *Jungle Book* and *The Terminator*, we always had to work within a very narrow set of rules. You're not allowed to do this and that. Especially Disney were very specific. So creatively, it was very cool to work on those games. But at the same time, you weren't allowed to do really anything. So by the time we got to *Earthworm Jim*, it was like, the handcuffs are off, right? Let's just go and launch some cows. And it just grew from there."

In its original version, *Earthworm Jim 2* consists of 16 levels including all subsections. And for a platformer, surprisingly few of them are actual platforming levels. Among other things, you can expect an isometric shooter, a transformation into a cave salamander or a quiz show (more on this in the Not Just Platforming panel). In Udderly Abducted, you have to carry certain quantities of cows through the area, which are occasionally abducted by aliens and run the risk of exploding if not dipped in overtly big bath tubs. There is a dystopian level called ISO ▶

"AT THE END OF EARTHWORM JIM 1, WE WERE DEAD"
NICK BRUTY

» [PC] The Three-Finger Gun is one of the game's weirder weapons. It's great for fighting cow-abducting aliens, though.

» [Mega Drive] There aren't that many typical enemies in the game. Most of them are aliens, all of them are weird.

NICK BRUTY
■ Nick was the game's art director and level designer. After Shiny he led Planet Moon Studios, and is now art director at Digital Eclipse.

NICK JONES
■ Nick was *Earthworm Jim 2*'s programming director. He's still an avid programmer at 2K's daughter company Visual Concepts.

MIKE DIETZ
■ Mike was the animation director for *Jim 2*. He's still working as an artist and animator for several art companies.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

EARTHWORM JIM
PLATFORM: MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
RELEASED: 1994

MDK (PICTURED)
PLATFORM: PC, PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1997

WILD 9
PLATFORM: PLAYSTATION
RELEASED: 1998

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** PLAYMATES INTERACTIVE/ VIRGIN INTERACTIVE
» **DEVELOPER:** SHINY ENTERTAINMENT
» **PLATFORM:** MEGA DRIVE, VARIOUS
» **RELEASED:** 1995
» **GENRE:** PLATFORMER

» [PC] The game is full of wacky ideas. At one point you have to chase a running door.

» [PC] If you miss too many of his puppies, Peter transforms into a raging, Jim-munching monster. Ouch!

▶ 9000, in which deadly filing cabinets jump around, and in which you have to pursue and bring down a door on the run. And the grand finale against Psy-Crow is not a typical boss fight, but a footrace instead. The reason for all this madness was that the developers could basically do what they wanted, as Nick Bruty explains, "We had the freedom to go off and do our own thing. We didn't have any schedules. We had no producer who sort of monitored how long things were taking. We just had our own sense of what needed to be done, and we always came through. So someone's gonna go and try Lorenzo's Soil or The Flyin' King or Villi People, and no one really questioned it. Finally, we were able to do whatever we wanted."

There is also the occasional fight in *Earthworm Jim 2*, but of course not like in other games. Sure, Jim has his trusty blaster gun, but this is basically the only 'normal' weapon in the game. There's the Bubble Gun, for example, which shoots cute little bubbles that serve no use whatsoever. Or the Barn Blaster smartbomb, which, after using, has Jim sitting on the floor in bewilderment. The enemies you fight are also very unusual: alien invaders in cow-coloured UFOs, flying octopuses, bureaucratic executioners and that's pretty much it. There aren't even that many bosses waiting: the very first duel, for example, is against King Goldfish (or simply Bob), who makes a highly dramatic entrance, only to be gobbled up by Jim without a comment. Psy-Crow is defeated in a footrace, Major Mucus just has to be shot at – there are only two actual fights: one is against Pedro Pupa in Lorenzen's Soil, and the other is against an oversized, fire-breathing steak in the hunger-inducing Level Ate.

In any case, everything and everyone looks simply fantastic. This starts with the beautifully silly opening, in which Jim plays the accordion next to the Sega logo while Princess What's-Her-Name, bored out of her mind by that, is kidnapped by Psy-Crow. All of this only lasts a few seconds, but it's marvellously barmy. And after that it only gets better, especially when it comes to the animations, such as the silly faces of the cows when they are delivered to the milking machine in Udderly Abducted. Jim himself moves in an equally silly way through the unusual levels. It's all very reminiscent of old, crazy cartoons, which really sets *Earthworm Jim 2* apart from its predecessor, in which Jim looked rather tough, especially in his resting poses. There's a good reason for this, as animation director Mike Dietz explains, "There was this divide at the company. Most of the American guys, which was mostly the animators, we wanted Jim to be like *Looney Tunes*, Chuck Jones, Tex Avery. The English guys were more into him being like a

"LET'S JUST GO AND LAUNCH SOME COWS"
NICK JONES

CONVERSION CAPERS

SNES

■ The SNES port was released at the same time as the Mega Drive version and differs from it only in graphical details. For example, there are some different backgrounds here and there, and a kind of glowing border around Jim in the Lorenzo's Soil level. In terms of content, however, everything is the same.

PC

■ The PC version was released in April 1996 with the subtitle "The Whole Can 'O Worms", and included *Jim 1* and *2*. The second game received a considerable graphical upgrade, with more colours in full VGA resolution, better voice quality and excellent music coming directly from CD. What was missing, however, was the Lorenzo's Soil level.

SATURN/PLAYSTATION

■ In May 1996, Jim also hopped onto Sega's Saturn. This version was identical to the Mega Drive original in terms of content, but offered more colours and more detailed backgrounds. Also, the level-end cows were no longer standing around in a meadow, but on surfboards on the beach. The PlayStation version released later and is very similar.

» [PC] Jim uses his buddy Snott to swing through parts of the level, which is only used a handful of times.

» [Mega Drive] Playing the delicious-looking Level Ate tends to make you hungry.

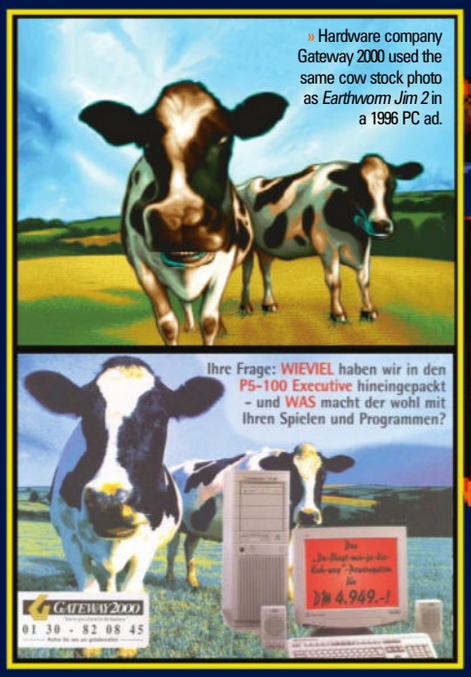
» [Mega Drive] *Earthworm Jim 2* is one of the silliest games ever made. In the first level you have to deal with Happy Oinkers!

tough, gnarly, cool guy. He ended up being both, and it was good that we had that back and forth between us. I mean, all of us, we'd only been animating a couple of years at that point. But we were getting better, and so we could do more interesting things with the characters, and we wanted to push it further. Sometimes it worked better, sometimes not as much."

From a technical point of view, *Earthworm Jim 2* is clearly one of the Mega Drive's most impressive games, featuring programming tricks that were rarely seen on the console – such as the smooth and deep line scrolling in the Puppy Love levels or the fluid level design in the second level Lorenzen's Soil (see the Rare Earths panel). The soundtrack is also easily on a par with the greatness of the graphics: it kicks off with the silly title song, becomes soothing with Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata* and shakes groovy calypso rhythms in The Flyin' King. All of this made for enthusiastic reviews, as the game received nothing but A grades: 95% in the fourth issue of *GamePro*, for example. And *Mean Machines Sega* did not include a review of the game in its regular issue 38, but instead dedicated a 16-page booklet to the game, which ended on another 95 points score.

Earthworm Jim 2 was to be Shiny Entertainment's last 2D and 16-bit game. After that, the company discovered the wonderful worlds of 3D, which led to games such as *MDK* (1997), *Wild 9* (1998) and *Enter The Matrix* (2003). The team eventually scattered to the four winds, but all of our interviewees have wonderful memories of the game's development. Nick Bruty, for example, says, "It was kind of the perfect storm of the perfect team with the perfect content on the perfect game system at the perfect time. It just kind of came together. I'm just amazed people still remember the game and talk about it. And we made it so quick."

Which, according to Nick Jones, is the only thing he still regrets to this day, "I do wish we had more time to fine-tune ▶


Ihre Frage: WIEVIEL haben wir in den P5-100 Executive hineingepackt – und WAS macht der wohl mit Ihren Spielen und Programmen?
GATEWAY2000
01 30 - 82 08 45

» Hardware company Gateway 2000 used the same cow stock photo as *Earthworm Jim 2* in a 1996 PC ad.

UNEARTHING THE SEQUEL'S MANY DIFFERENT VERSIONS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

■ The 2002 GBA version of *Jim 2*, which was based on the SNES version and developed by the Russian studio SuperEmpire, is considered to be the worst version of the game: terrible graphics, horrible sound, sometimes snail-like game speed – it's a genuinely poor version of a great game. At least it contains all the levels of the original.

NES

■ There was never an official NES version of *Earthworm Jim 2*, but two unofficial ones. Both come from China, one from Shin-Shin (1996) and one from SuperGame (1997). Both differ slightly in terms of content, both are technically terrible for the most part and both offer very different levels – but always fewer than in the original.

NES (AGAIN)

■ In 1996, a game called *Happy Biqi III: World Fighter* was released exclusively in China. It's another conversion of *Earthworm Jim 2*, which contains most of the levels from the original. However, it stars a little boy as the hero, an owl as the villain and many in-game changes – the Flyin' King section, for example, is now a vertical scroller.

» [PlayStation] To this day, *Earthworm Jim 2* looks and sounds amazing.

» [Mega Drive] No two levels are the same, there is an incredible amount of diversity in *Earthworm Jim 2*.

» [PC] ISO 9000 is a surprisingly dystopic level.

▶ parts of it. Like the difficulty level which is really random, across both games. You look back at it now and you think, gosh, it's so difficult. But that's what games were like back then. Today we would make it more forgiving."

Nick Bruty fondly remembers the great team atmosphere, "One of the things I really think helped with all of these games for us was the actual environment that we were in. We had this kind of weird office where it was like three compartments, with all the programmers and designers and artists in one huge room. But the walls only went up about five, six foot high. There was a gap at the top. So you could hear everybody in the office. I could never do it now, but back then it worked. And I remember, it got to the point where Nick Jones was just this voice on the other side of the wall. So he put a picture of me on his side, and whenever he wanted something of me, he would just talk to the picture."

Mike remembers a lot of Nerf-gun battles that not always ended well, "You never knew when they're going to start and there would be eruptions of bullets just flying everywhere. And I remember poor Nick Jones was sitting behind his monitor in the other office. I just looked over, and I shot one bullet and it hit him right in the eye. I've never seen Nick so mad in my life."

So it's no wonder that every once in a while extreme measures were necessary to maintain office peace, as Nick Jones tells us, "There was this one developer,

» [PC] When all else fails, Jim can use his Worm-self as a quick whip.

"IT WAS KIND OF THE PERFECT STORM" NICK BRUTY

Charles Loop. He was like six foot six and he was built like a bodybuilder. I remember one time I was playing this one CD. I don't remember what it was, but I was playing the same CD over and over and over again. These guys were used to it, they could deal with it. But Charles came over to me, and he said, 'Give me the CD.' And I'm like, 'What do mean?' He said, 'Give me the CD.' I took the CD out, and I gave it to him, and he just reached up and stuffed it in the rafters of the ceiling where I couldn't get it. He just stuffed it there, said, 'I don't want to hear that ever again'. And then, without another word, he got back to his computer."

On the other hand, the team also did a lot of sport together, which was mainly thanks to Mike Dietz, as Nick Bruty recalls, "We were all unfit Brits, and Mike got us all running. He is a marathon runner, and

NOT JUST PLATFORMING

BECOME A CAVE SALAMANDER

■ Level 03 (generally known as Villi People) sees Jim being transformed into a blind cave salamander named Sally, floating through someone's intestinal tract, shooting enemies, collecting mealworms and avoiding pinball bumpers. You think that's weird? Oh, you ain't seen nothin' yet!

MASTER A QUIZ SHOW

■ At the end of Villi People, Jim becomes a contestant in a weird game show, featuring questions like, "How does Jim spell his first name?", "What colour is Jim's red gun?" or, "Does Jim's mother approve of the girls he dates?" The most absurd answer is usually the right one.

TAKE TO THE SKIES

■ The Flyin' King is the fourth level of the game. In this isometric shooter level, Jim flies his Pocket Rocket, bouncing a Bomb Balloon all the way to the end in order to destroy the boss, Major Mucus (of *Earthworm Jim 1* fame), while avoiding pirate ships and catapulted sumo wrestlers.

SAVE ALL OF THE PUPPIES

■ Psy-Crow has kidnapped Peter Puppy's offspring and throws them through the air. Jim needs to bounce them to Peter, using a giant marshmallow. Puppy Love is great fun (inspired by Nintendo's Game & Watch series, according to Nick Jones) but overstays its welcome.

» [PC] There's only two real boss fights in the game, one of them is against a surprisingly agile steak.

he motivated us to go running with him. I got in, Nick Jones got in, and then just one by one, everybody was doing it, and we were all different levels of fitness. But we'd all run the same route, along the beach and up over rocks. And it was always all about the team. I would be running and I could see Nick looking behind at me to see where I was. I could see the white of his eyes, the fear. He's trying to run faster. And it was really cohesive. I've never been that cohesive as a team ever since that. And Mike actually got me and Nick Jones in the best shapes of our lives."

"WE WERE ABLE TO DO WHATEVER WE WANTED" NICK BRUTY

All of this made for a game that is just as much fun today as it was 30 years ago. It's wonderfully daft and varied, each level is completely different from the last. It's wild chaos that just happens to be a game – but that's exactly what makes *Earthworm Jim 2* so damn special to this day. ✱

SOME OF THE WEIRD THINGS JIM WILL DO

BECOME A STAIR LIFT MASTER

■ Shortly after the beginning of the game, Jim gets a chance to rest his weary feet: in the Granny Chair section of the level, he ascends a long stairwell adorned with *Jaws* posters while evading umbrella-wielding grannies who otherwise give him a proper bashing.

BECOME A BEAUTIFUL BALLOON

■ Later on, Jim visits the Carnival Of Scars which he can only traverse by inflating his head and floating all the way up. En route, he must avoid Evil The Cat (from the first game's What The Heck level) who attacks him with spitballs and his very sharp claws.

RARE EARTHS

HOW ONE LEVEL (ALMOST) BROUGHT THE DEVELOPERS TO THEIR KNEES

■ The second section Lorenzen's Soil (aka Lorenzo's Soil for later versions) is a very unusual level. Especially from a technical point of view, as its structure is not predefined. A large part of the level consists of soil, which Jim blasts away at the top of the screen with his Electric Cannon (which is used only here), whereupon it trickles down, recomposes underneath him and pushes him upwards, which ultimately leads him to Pedro Pupa, a gigantic larva on a unicycle.

The level structure around Jim is constantly redrawn in real-time, which is extremely CPU-intensive, and shouldn't really be possible on a 16-bit system like the Mega Drive. The fact that this level exists is thanks to the genius of lead programmer Andy Astor, who once said the following on the British videogame TV show *Bad Influence*, "My first reaction was, you can't do that. But they persuaded me to give it a little harder try."

And so he did. However, until the last minute it wasn't certain that the level would end up in the final game, as Nick Jones confirmed, "It took ages for it to be fairly bug-free. There were always these edge cases that would make you just fall through the level. We had to check every single possible permutation of shooting the backgrounds out and making it so that there were no holes in it. It was a huge challenge."

» [Mega Drive] Lorenzen's Soil doesn't really play well. But from a technological point of view, the level was a technical masterpiece.

Many thanks to Michael Koelsch for die *Earthworm Jim 2* artwork.

NiGHTS Into Dreams

A DREAMY DELIGHT

RETROREVIVAL

» SATURN » 1996 » SONIC TEAM

Being a big Sonic fan, I spent years wondering what *NiGHTS Into Dreams* might be like. I was keen to see what the hedgehog's creators had come up with for the transition to 3D gaming, but without the benefit of YouTube or even a Saturn-owning friend, all I could do was read and re-read magazine coverage. That all changed when my friend James gave me his Saturn during a clear out in 2002. His great taste meant I had games like *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Virtua Cop*, *Sega Rally*, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* and *Tomb Raider* straight away – but not *NiGHTS*. He did have *Christmas NiGHTS* though, and that convinced me I needed the full game.

Within months, I'd found it for about £5 on eBay and convinced my mum to let me use her debit card to get it. Did I have the analogue controller for the optimal experience? No, but I didn't care. I already knew that I could enjoy the game with a standard pad thanks to my time with the *Christmas* version, and I was also prepared for what the game actually is – a hardcore score chaser, which challenges you to maximise your time, create huge combos and rack up the points.

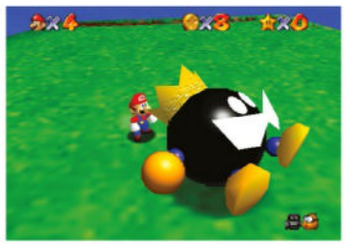
What I wasn't prepared for was the sheer inventiveness of it all. I remember sitting there with another friend, Dave, marvelling at the bouncy trampoline floors and giant mirrors in Soft Museum, the magnetic accumulation of objects and tower ascent in Stick Canyon, even *NiGHTS* turning into a sled in Frozen Bell (as shown here). The game may not be long but it's a relentless barrage of creativity from start to finish, with ideas that other games would run into the ground being introduced, allowed a moment to delight you, and then retired just in time for another little slice of brilliance. Ultimately, *NiGHTS* was worth every minute I waited – it has a spark that age has never managed to dull.

THE RETRO GAMER GUIDE TO THE NINTENDO® 64

WITH THE RECENT RELEASE OF THE ANALOGUE 3D IT FEELS LIKE A GREAT TIME TO REVISIT THIS CONSOLE'S LIBRARY. SO HERE IS A SELECTION OF THE N64'S MOST INTERESTING TITLES. HOW MANY DID YOU EXPERIENCE?

WORDS BY DARRAN JONES
INTERVIEWS BY DAMIEN MCFERRAN, IAN DRANSFIELD AND RORY MILNE

For some, Nintendo's 64-bit console is where things started to go wrong for the Kyoto-based publisher. Nintendo's bullish decision to stick with cartridges over the ever-popular CD-ROM saw it lose key 16-bit supporters such as Squaresoft and Enix, while its lack of diversity within certain key genres such as the RPG and fighting markets also hurt its reputation. It mattered not though, for while the N64's library was small compared to its rivals, the PlayStation and Saturn, it arguably had some of the most important games of the generation on it, and better yet, they were all exclusives. Nintendo may not have had the support it had enjoyed during the 8- and 16-bit days, but its in-house developers were arguably at their most creative, producing games that would shape their respective genres for years to come. That's one impressive legacy.



SUPER MARIO 64 1996

NINTENDO EAD

Play *Super Mario 64* today and you're instantly reminded that it's still a stunning piece of game design. Sure, it looks a little rough around the edges and the camera can give you the odd issue, but the creativity to be found in both its gameplay design and imaginatively crafted worlds really does impress. Like *Super Mario World* before it, it pushed the platformer genre forward, but this time the introduction of 3D allowed for even more exciting gameplay mechanics. Your control of Mario is intrinsically linked to the N64's three-pronged controller, allowing the versatile plumber to pull off a staggering variety of moves. And then, of course, there's the sandbox design of each world, which lets you to tackle the game's challenges however you choose. The beauty of *Super Mario 64* is that you never know what's around the corner; one minute you're racing a penguin down a slippery slope, the next you're swinging Bowser by the tail, meaning it always feels fresh and exciting. The fact that it's still able to evoke those feelings nearly three decades on is nothing short of staggering.

PILOTWINGS 64 1996

PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT

Nintendo's collaboration with Paradigm Entertainment set a benchmark for what was possible on the N64 in the same way that the original game highlighted the power of the SNES. Each of the different events: Hang Gliding, Rocket Belt and Gyrocopter are easy to play, but difficult to master, while the entertaining bonus rounds range from the delightful to the absurd. And when you're done with the game's tough challenges simply take to the air as Birdman, a mode that is as relaxing as it is impressive to look at.

WAVE RACE 64 1996

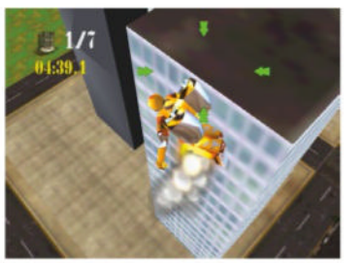
NINTENDO EAD

Twenty-nine years on and we're still in awe of just how realistic *Wave Race 64*'s water is. It feels alive in a way that few other games seem to achieve, meaning that in addition to racing against the challenging AI opponents you're also fighting against the very elements as well. Sadly, *Wave Race: Blue Storm* would be the franchise's last game.

MARIO KART 64 1996

NINTENDO EAD

New additions to the series include an excellent four-player mode and far more interesting track design thanks to the introduction of proper 3D graphics. Many of the tracks remain brilliant to race on, while Battle Mode becomes even more essential with the addition of two more players. The annoying Purple Shell can do one though, since it marks the point where the series became more of a party game.



BLAST CORPS 1997

RARE

Rare was one of the most creative developers on Nintendo's 64-bit console and *Blast Corps* is all the proof you need of that fact. You use a variety of different demolition vehicles to level everything in the surrounding area so you can guide a nuclear missile carrier to safety. Each vehicle – and the later robot mechs you gain access to – greatly vary the dynamics of play meaning there's a surprising amount of strategy to go alongside all the wanton destruction.

LYLAT WARS 1997

NINTENDO EAD

Nintendo's supercharged sequel remains the best game in the franchise, effortlessly channelling the spirit of *Star Wars* and countless other sci-fi flicks. The first N64 game to include rumble support remains an incredibly satisfying blaster thanks to its exceptional level design, tight controls and endearing roster of cute-looking heroes. The medal system the game employs ensures plenty of replay value, while the epic boss encounters make for dramatic battles.

MISCHIEF MAKERS 1997

TREASURE

While its peers were forging ahead with 3D, Treasure decided to stick with what it knew best and created a 2D extravaganza. While the new catching mechanic *Mischief Makers* uses can be tricky to get to grips with, perseverance rewards you with one of the system's most interesting and unique games.

MYSTICAL NINJA STARRING GOEMON 1997

KONAMI

Although it abandoned the two-player mode that had made *The Legend Of The Mystical Ninja* so popular, Konami's first 3D outing for its purple-haired hero lost none of the humour or wackiness of the earlier games. An equally solid sequel called *Goemon's Great Adventure* appeared the following year with a restored multiplayer mode.

GOLDENEYE 007 1997

RARE

Martin Hollis and his team created a multi-layered shooter with incredible level design and cutting-edge 3D that established a template that all future console FPS games would imitate. It's astonishing to think the fabled multiplayer was knocked up at the last minute by Steve Ellis.

DIDDY KONG RACING 1997

RARE

Many gamers prefer this to *Mario Kart 64* and it's not hard to understand why. It retains the same four-player racing as its predecessor but also allows the use of planes and hovercrafts, which greatly vary the gameplay. The Adventure Mode is a brilliant touch too, since it offers far more structure than *Mario Kart 64* and allows you to race against a gigantic pig.

FIGHTER'S DESTINY 1998

GENKI

The N64 is poorly served when it comes to enjoyable one-on-one brawlers, and it's arguably one of the weakest genres on the system. On the other hand it does has some highly unusual offerings, including this brilliant gem from Genki, which utilises a highly involved points system that rewards you for defeating your opponent with trickier to pull-off moves. Some of the characters are utterly bizarre and it's not the prettiest-looking game, but the depth of its mechanics is to be applauded. An equally enjoyable sequel, *Fighter's Destiny 2*, appeared in 2000.

1080° SNOWBOARDING 1998

NINTENDO EAD

Nintendo's snowboarding game harks back to a time when Nintendo games were as challenging as they were fun to play. *1080° Snowboarding* is certainly not an easy game to master, but it's highly rewarding when you finally pull off a perfect run and leave your friends feeling piste.

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER '98 1998

KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT OSAKA

Konami's *ISS* series began life on the SNES, but it arguably came of age on the N64. It's far more arcade-like than other examples of the genre, but that's to its advantage as games are fast-paced with fluid player movement and plenty of chances to score goals. It lacks the official licences that made the EA games of the time so desirable, but when it comes to pure gameplay, the '98 iteration of Konami's football series is pretty much unbeatable. The penalty kick mode is great fun, too.

WETRIX 1998

ZED TWO

This imaginative puzzle game has the player trying to score as many points as possible by using pieces to manipulate lakes and the water found within them. Letting water spill off the landscape fills your Drain meter, which causes the game to end, so you need to use various items to stop that from happening. It takes a little while to understand how the mechanics work, but once it clicks it becomes one of the system's most compelling puzzlers.

BANJO-KAZOOIE 1998

RARE

The second best platformer on the N64 remains a delight to play. The interplay between Banjo and Kazooie is every bit as entertaining as their abilities are to use, while the level design of each world feels alive and organic. Oh, and it perfectly balances the collecting that would bloat many later Rare N64 games.

F-ZERO X 1998

NINTENDO EAD

The N64's best racer builds on everything that made the original *F-Zero* great, but amplifies it massively. The track design is exemplary, really testing your skills on the later cups, while the sheer number of opponents makes every race a white-knuckle thrill ride. Oh, and the four-player race mode is simply glorious.

PILOTING PILOTWINGS 64

DAVE GATCHEL LOOKS BACK AT THE N64 LAUNCH GAME

WHY DID NINTENDO APPROACH YOU TO WORK ON *PILOTWINGS*?

At the time, it was clear that Nintendo's interest in us was due to our experience in 3D graphics. We had very little experience developing games and no experience developing console games. Nintendo approached us knowing that we already understood most of the issues related to the 3D technology, and that they would need to help us understand the issues surrounding game design. Also, several of us had previous experience working with CGI during the integration of new hardware, which might have been perceived as an advantage.

DID YOU WORK ALONGSIDE NINTENDO AT ALL?

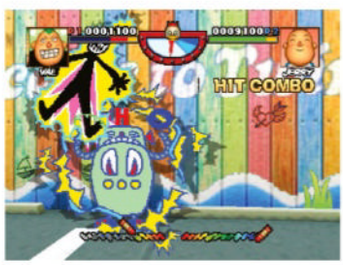
Prior to *Pilotwings 64* our strength had been high-end 3D graphics, developing tools and applications for the simulation and training industry. As a result, we worked with the design staff from Nintendo. Our initial contact was Mr Takeda, who at the time managed Nintendo's R&D3 group and was in charge of the overall N64 development. On the design side, the lead designer was Makoto Wada, who was a member of Miyamoto's design group. During the production, we learned a great deal from working with Nintendo, not just about game design specifically, but also about producing games in general. The schedule was intense and the stakes were quite high for us, but overall it was a lot of fun.

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE?

Nintendo was leading the design effort; however, [it was] willing to consider suggestions from the team. In some respects, since the schedule was so tight, it really became necessary for the design and production team to work collaboratively. What sticks out for me was the schedule; our goal was to be a launch title, and to achieve that it took an incredible effort from the entire team, really the entire company. During the last four to five months, it wasn't unusual for the majority of the team to work through most of the night. Everyone really extended themselves to the limit. Initially everything related to the industry was so new to us I honestly don't think we felt a great deal of pressure. Later, once it became clear that Nintendo was counting on us to deliver a launch title and it would only be *Mario 64* and *Pilotwings 64* at launch, there was some pressure.

DID YOU ENJOY YOUR TIME?

Working on *Pilotwings 64* was truly a great experience. Nintendo was one of the most professional and supportive organisations that I've had the pleasure of dealing with. [It] introduced us to game development, and [was] a great mentor on what it takes to produce great products and to survive in this industry.



RAKUGAKIDS 1998

KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT KOBE

Konami's utterly wacky fighter proved the company had lost none of its creativity from the 16-bit period. The character roster may be small, but being made from crayon drawings mean they have a fantastical range of wacky special moves that are as memorable as the game's character designs.

BODY HARVEST 1998

DMA DESIGN

It hasn't aged gracefully, but *Body Harvest* is still worth diving back into. Painfully delayed (it was intended as a launch game) it has a fully interactive sandbox world with a large amount of vehicles you can use as you face off against a deadly alien onslaught. True, you'll battle the camera as much as the aliens, but it's still worth experiencing.

SPACE STATION SILICON VALLEY 1998

DMA DESIGN

This incredibly inventive game is one of the N64's most underappreciated gems. You have to navigate the game world's four environments and solve puzzles by using your tiny robot to take over a variety of robotic animals, all with their own unique abilities. It was eventually ported to the PlayStation and Game Boy Color.

GLOVER 1998

INTERACTIVE STUDIOS

Inspired by the Oliver twins watching Crazy Golf, *Glover* has you using a disembodied glove to guide a ball through a variety of different stages. Glover's skill set enables him to dribble, bounce and throw his ball and even run across it or use it as a trampoline. The ball itself can also be changed into a variety of forms, allowing you to better solve the many puzzles that crop up throughout *Glover*'s six worlds.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: OCARINA OF TIME 1998

NINTENDO EAD

Like *Super Mario 64* before it, *Ocarina Of Time* created a brand-new template for 3D adventure games that is still being felt today, with Z-targeting being one of the most important features it brought to modern game design. If you need further indication of its brilliance simply play the remake on 3DS; you'd think it was a game from that generation.

THE POD KING

JON KNOLES REVISITS EPISODE 1 RACER

WHAT ACCESS DID YOU HAVE?

We worked off of photographs of life-sized podracers from the movie set, more detailed smaller scale models used as reference for CG models ILM would later build, photos of miniature sets for the film, and vehicle and character sketches from Lucasfilm's concept artists. Originally, the podracers all looked the same: each had an egg-shaped pod pulled by two massive jet airplane engines. We watched these concepts evolve into visually distinct vehicles, each with unique silhouettes and colour schemes, and equally diverse alien drivers. I think there were 24 podracers and drivers in the movie, and three of us at LucasArts built all of them in various levels of detail.

WHY DID YOU SET RACES ON DIFFERENT WORLDS?

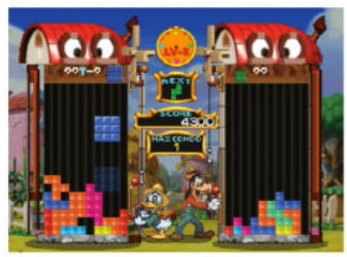
We had plenty of conceptual art to serve as reference for the Tatooine race seen in the film, but wanted to take players on a colourful tour of the whole galaxy. We enjoyed a good deal of freedom, and invented planets purely for the game.

HOW DID YOU GO ABOUT DESIGNING THE GAME?

Three of us designed all of the 20-something tracks in the game. There was one top-down sketch of the Tatooine Boonta Eve Classic race course provided by Lucasfilm, which I used as inspiration and reference when building that track in-game – our first test track. I attempted to build it to scale and discovered it would take nearly 15 minutes to complete a single lap – even at speeds of 400mph! That was too big for our game engine, let alone for fun gameplay. So I reduced it considerably, then widened it accordingly. A great 'aha' moment happened when trying to recreate a big canyon jump. The testers were having a blast seeing how far they could fly, and asked us if we could make the jumps bigger. Before you knew it, we were cutting big holes in every track and making crazy jumps.

WHY AREN'T THERE ANY POWER-UPS?

As odd as it sounds, we didn't like the idea of peppering the course with power-ups. We wanted to be as authentic to the film as we could, even given the graphical limitations of the N64. We did agree there had to be a recharge mechanic for using the boost – or you'd just use it all the time, but because Anakin's mechanical repair skills were a big part of the race scene, we wanted to play around with that idea of pushing your vehicle beyond its limits, then being able to fix it on the fly.



MAGICAL TETRIS CHALLENGE 1998

CAPCOM

A port of Capcom's little-known arcade game; this is a rather entertaining *Tetris* variant that pits classic Disney characters like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck against each other. It's separated from other *Tetris* games by the amazingly silly Magical Tetris mode, which has you dealing with stupidly oversized pieces that come in a range on un-*Tetris* like shapes.

HARVEST MOON 64 1999

VICTOR INTERACTIVE SOFTWARE

Restoring a rundown farm might not sound like fun, but Victor Interactive's sequel proves otherwise. It's a little tougher than its SNES predecessor due to having less time to perform your farming duties, but its structure is far stronger and the ability to marry one of five eligible girls ensures that the game has a lot more depth and reasons to replay it.

BEETLE ADVENTURE RACING 1999

PARADIGM ENTERTAINMENT

Known in Australia as *HSV Adventure Racing*, this is an excellent racing game that has you tearing around some brilliantly designed tracks in the (then) newly designed Volkswagen Beetle. The exceptional track design really rewards those that explore, allowing adventurous players to discover all sorts of hidden secrets and clever shortcuts.

SHADOW MAN 1999

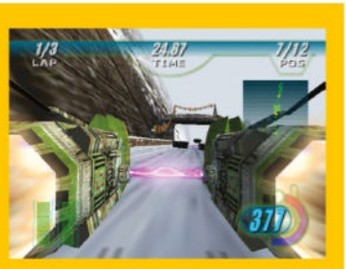
ACCLAIM STUDIOS TEESIDE

Acclaim released some excellent games on the N64, and this is arguably one of its best. Based on a graphic novel, it's an incredibly mature release for the system, which probably explains why it garnered so much attention. Even without the gore and swearing it remains an engaging adventure with a neat world-switching mechanic and the chance to hunt down Jack The Ripper.

POKÉMON SNAP 1999

HAL LABORATORY/PAX SOFTNICA

No traditional *Pokémon* games appeared on the N64, but plenty of superb spin-offs did and they were all super effective. This enchanting on-rails snapper has you travelling through a bunch of environments using a variety of objects to entice Pokémon out of hiding and in reach of your camera. Multiple routes and different Pokémon behaviours mean there's always a better opportunity to get a better snap and boost your score.



STAR WARS EPISODE 1: RACER 1999

LUCASARTS

Only one *Star Wars* offering was making our list and it's this excellent futuristic racer. The track design is brilliant, it captures all the essence of the original podrace sequence and there's plenty of variety between the different pods. You can even use two N64 controllers to recreate the ultimate podracing experience.

WORLD DRIVER CHAMPIONSHIP 1999

BOSS GAME STUDIOS

Once you get used to the steering of its earlier cars, this exhilarating offering from Boss Game Studios turns out to be one of the system's best racers. It might suffer from weedy sound and a lack of licensed cars, but the track design and challenging AI more than make up for it.

MARIO GOLF 1999

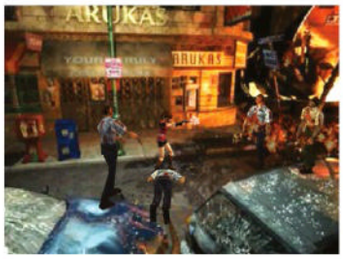
CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING

Notable for its Transfer Pak compatibility that let you upload characters from the Game Boy Color game, Camelot's game kicks all other golf offerings over the green thanks to its accessible mechanics, varied characters, buckets of charm and an array of highly entertaining minigames. The skins match is a particular highlight, showing the diversity between the ten available characters.

OGRE BATTLE 64: PERSON OF LORDLY CALIBER 1999

QUEST/DUAL CORPORATION

The only English version is confined to the US, making this a pricey game to track down. It's worth it though as *Ogre Battle 64* is the best strategy game on the N64 thanks to multiple endings, a large number of classes to master and some extremely challenging maps.



RESIDENT EVIL 2 1999

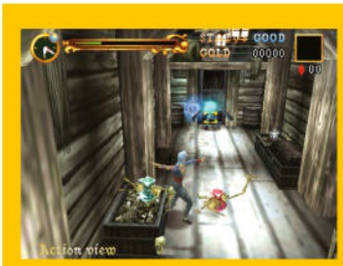
CAPCOM

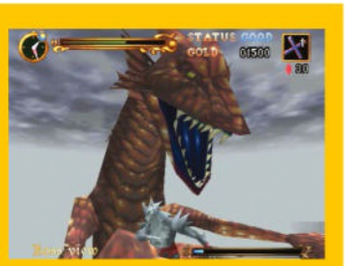
This superb port is sought-after by *Resident Evil* fans as it boasts a number of unique features. There are exclusive alternate costumes, a new randomiser that kicks in upon completing the game, the ability to change the level of gore and 16 new Ex Files, which greatly expands on the franchise's lore.

SUPER SMASH BROS 1999

HAL LABORATORY

This four-player punch-em-up remains the best N64 brawler. It's a fast and furious scrapper where you must raise a character's damage total so you have a better chance of hitting them out of the themed arenas. It might not be as epic as its sequels, but the fighting mechanics remain incredibly polished and hide a surprising amount of depth.

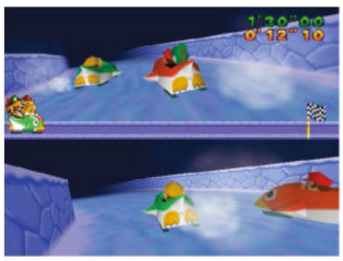




CASTLEVANIA: LEGACY OF DARKNESS 1999

KONAMI COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT KOBE

This is a far better stab at a 3D *Castlevania* and is a prequel and improved update of the original rushed N64 game, which debuted 11 months earlier. In addition to supporting the Expansion Pak, it features two new characters – dropped from the first release – new bosses and areas and a far better camera and framerate. It also includes an enhanced version of the original game, too.



MARIO PARTY 2 1999

HUDSON SOFT

Hudson Soft's fun sequel fixes many of the issues of its first party game. There are fewer minigames that rely on rapidly spinning the N64's analogue stick, the board design is a lot better and less laborious to play through, while the ability to wear themed costumes is a lovely touch. It also adds several new types of games, making it even more competitive than the original.

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: MAJORA'S MASK 2000

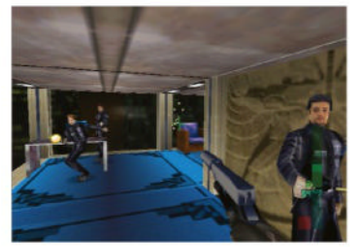
NINTENDO EAD

Majora's Mask is one of the most interesting games in the *Zelda* canon, thanks to its perpetually repeating three-day cycle that sees Link using his new Ocarina abilities to stop the moon from crashing into Termina. Masks play a key role in the game too, with the 24 different masks benefitting Link in a variety of ways.

EXCITEBIKE 64 2000

LEFT FIELD PRODUCTIONS

This excellent sequel features a 20-stage campaign mode to race through, a large number of licensed motorbikes, satisfyingly challenging AI opponents and sensational-looking graphics. It's packed with extras too, including the original NES game, a solid 3D update, a fantastic track editor and an excellent randomly generated desert stage.



PERFECT DARK 2000

RARE

Like *GoldenEye*, *Perfect Dark* shows its age, but it also highlights the creativity that was abundant at Rare. Some of the weapons have still never been bettered within the genre, while the campaign mode remains exceptionally well structured and full of tasks to complete. As with *Blast Corps* and *Banjo-Kazooie*, an enhanced version now exists on Xbox One.

STARCRAFT 64 2000

MASS MEDIA

This sublime RTS is now rapidly rising in price and has become incredibly sought-after. While it lacked the online options of its PC counterpart and doesn't have the fluidness of control that a mouse offers, it does feature the *Brood War* expansion pack, a fun split-screen mode and several exclusive missions.

MARIO TENNIS 2000

CAMELOT SOFTWARE PLANNING

Like *Mario Golf* before it, *Mario Tennis* adds numerous bonuses, including new courts if it's linked to the Game Boy Color game. While it utilises a relatively simple control system, it still allows the 16 available characters to pull off a wide variety of moves. Its minigames aren't quite as polished as the ones found in *Mario Golf*, but its excellent multiplayer mode will certainly test friendships.

TALKING CONKER

CHRIS SEAVOR ON HIS FOUL-MOUTHED SQUIRREL

WHO MADE THE DECISION TO REDESIGN THE GAME?

Twelve Tales, even though it was more similar to *Mario 64* in terms of tone than *Dream* initially, was the one that had to change after *Banjo-Kazooie* became a thing. Having two cutesy first-party 3D platformers coming out at the same time on the same console was questionable, but from the same studio wasn't really an option.

WHAT DID NINTENDO THINK ABOUT THE DARKER TONE OF *CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY*?

I'm not sure what people at NCL thought, I'm guessing they just trusted Rare. "You wanna do this? OK… Off you go". As for NOA I didn't really care what they thought, indeed I once got called out by someone at a party. They clearly didn't like *Conker*. I'd also heard of a few other snide comments from a few people, but they'd never actually been in development so what did they know anyway.

WHY CHOOSE A SQUIRREL AS THE MAIN CHARACTER?

I didn't. That was one of the few things that carried over from *TT*, where the squirreliness of Conker had more relevance. Indeed, his initial movement style was on four legs, rather than two, jumping from point to point very much like his real-world counterpart.

WHERE DID THE GAME'S MANY CONTEXT-SENSITIVE MECHANICS ORIGINATE?

The catapault pad was Tim [Stamper]'s, if I remember it right, but we definitely ran with it… It was basically our 'get out of jail free' card regarding narrative and, not least, an opportunity for a few poor jokes…

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE FILM PARODY FROM THE GAME AND WHY?

Saving Private Rodent for sure… The amount of work that went into that whole setpiece was a game's worth in itself… everyone on the team were at the top of their game at that point in development and I was really happy how it turned out.

PAPER MARIO 2000

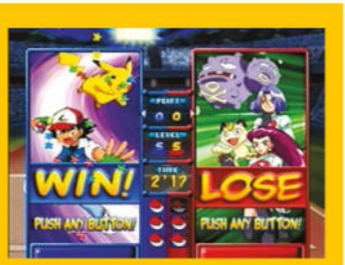
INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

Everything about Intelligent Systems' RPG impresses, from its gameplay mechanics to the paper-thin aesthetic styling of Mario's world. It's not the most challenging RPG around, but it's filled with character and offers a surprisingly good story as Mario and pals once again attempt to rescue Princess Peach from Bowser.

TUROK 3: SHADOW OF OBLIVION 2000

ACCLAIM STUDIOS AUSTIN

You can't have an N64 list without a *Turok* game, it's the law. *Turok 3* is far tighter in its design than the rambling *Seeds Of Evil* and features a robust multiplayer mode that borrows the AI bot system featured in *Perfect Dark*. It's all rounded off with some of the best boss encounters to be found in the series.



POKÉMON PUZZLE LEAGUE 2000

NINTENDO SOFTWARE TECHNOLOGY

It may be a simple reskin of *Panel De Pon*, but since that's one of the best puzzle games around we'll forgive it. The competitive multiplayer mode is as addictive as you'd expect, while the new 3D mode adds a satisfying twist to the standard *Panel De Pon* gameplay. Just be aware, though, that some of the AI opponents can be insanely difficult to best.

SIN & PUNISHMENT 2000

TREASURE

Even today Treasure's final N64 game remains an astonishing tour de force, highlighting just what was possible on Nintendo's system. The plot is crazier than a bag of cats, but the action throughout is peerless, delivering some of the finest explosions and boss battles to ever appear on Nintendo's console. A sequel hit the Wii in 2009.

POKÉMON STADIUM 2 2000

NINTENDO EAD

Although the N64 never received a proper *Pokémon* RPG, this enhanced sequel did at least allow you to act out battles in full 3D. Like its predecessor, it made heavy use of the Transfer Pak, enabling you to use Pokémon from the first three Game Boy games, as well as *Gold*, *Silver* and *Crystal*. It's further boosted by a selection of genuinely decent minigames.

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY 2001

RARE

Rare's last game was a fitting swan song for Nintendo's console. Technically it's a triumph, while its lowbrow humour and buckets of gore was a world away from Rare's earlier work on the console. It might have been bettered on Microsoft's Xbox, but the N64 version is far more desirable with pristine copies selling for hundreds online.

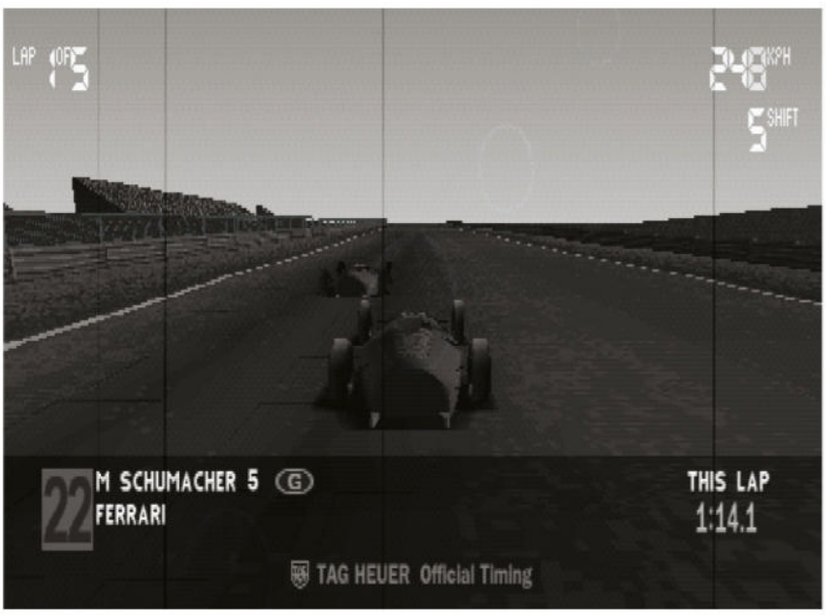
This article first appeared in issue 191 of *games™*

FORMULA 1 97

» **PLATFORM:** PLAYSTATION » **RELEASED:** 1997 » **CHEAT TYPE:** SECRET STAGE » **CHEAT COMPLEXITY:** VERY HIGH

If you're finding that having access to every circuit from the 1997 Formula 1 season just isn't enough, the good news is that there are more hidden away – but they're normally reserved as prizes for winning every race on each of the four difficulty levels. The better news is that they're exceptionally easy to access with a quick cheat. Start Grand Prix mode, enter the Driver Select menu and then select Edit Driver. From here, change any driver's name to BILLY BONUS and select him. Once you've done that, back out and head to the Circuit Select menu, where you'll have access to four hidden circuits.

Adia is a reversed version of the 1995 season Pacific Grand Prix circuit in Aida, Japan, and Edialeda likewise represents that season's Australian Grand Prix in Adelaide. Sunob is another reversed version, this time of the bonus F1 car-shaped circuit from the original game. The best, however, is Sixties – a throwback version of Silverstone, complete with a black-and-white camera effect and a grid of period cars. *



MORE CHEATS TO TRY OUT

TALKING HEADS

Rename your driver to BOX CHATTER in the manner described in our main cheat, and during your race you'll see cartoon representations of Martin Brundle and the late, great Murray Walker, whose mouths move as they commentate on the action.

BIG WHEELS

If you've ever wanted F1 cars with ridiculously huge wheels, enter LITTLE WEELZ as your driver name and they'll be so big that you can barely see ahead of your car. Could this inclusion be a nod to fellow 1997 Psygnosis racer *Monster Trucks*?

ZERO GRAVITY

Enter PI MAN as your driver's name, and you'll get a definite tribute to a Psygnosis stablemate. All the cars suddenly have no wheels or engine sounds, and emit an exhaust trail of blue light just like the anti-gravity racers found in *WipEout 2097*.

AM2 MUCH?

Enter your driver's name as VIRTUALLY VIRTUAL, and you'll strip the textures from the track and cars during the race. The resulting flat-shaded polygonal look is reminiscent of Sega AM2's arcade classic *Virtua Racing*, which the code is a clear nod to.

BIRD'S EYE

Another tribute to arcade racers of old can be found using the name ZOOM LENSE, which gives you a top-down view of the action. The colours are also made bolder, giving an appearance reminiscent of Eighties games like *Monaco GP* and *Spy Hunter*.

FROG FALL

Let's finish off with a weird one. If you enter CATS DOGS as your driver name, you'll find that any races in the rain will now have frogs falling from the sky – a rare meteorological event, but one that genuinely does happen on occasion.

MAGAZINE CRAFT

DAN CURLEY

In the early Nineties, Dan was a TV regular as the European Sega Champion. Over the decades that followed, he'd head into development, write gargantuan guides, break big news stories and help to guide a beloved magazine's final issues. We catch up with him to relive the ups and downs of a sometimes tempestuous career

Words by Nick Thorpe

THEN

Dan initially freelanced for *Sega Power* before turning to game development at studios including Tiertex and Software Creations. He later worked on *Official PlayStation Magazine*, *360* and other titles.

NOW

After five years as a TV editor for Orange and a decade working for Channel 4 in a role that primarily involved copy editing, Dan has recently returned to freelance writing while he plots his next career move.

SegaPro SUPERSTARS (1)
Danny Curley – We met the Sega European Champ recently, and what did we find him reading but a copy of the most prestigious SegaPro! As we thought, real Pros just can't survive without their monthly dose of SegaPro. Good on yer, Curley, now we know your secret.

» Here's the photo in *Sega Pro* that caused a rift between Dan and *Sega Power*'s Andy Smith.

You were a well-known name before you'd ever written for a magazine, because you were the UK and later European Sega champion. How did that come about?
I saw a piece in *Sega Power* saying that there was a double decker bus being driven around the country where you just go on and have a go. So I just entered and, you know, won Manchester, won the UK, won Europe. However, I was a published videogame reviewer before that happened. When I was about 13 years old, I sent a review into – it was either Teletext or Ceefax. This was pre-Biffo, pre-Digitiser. I sent a few reviews in, but eventually they picked one and put it on and it was for *Vigilante* on the Master System. It wasn't professional, but that was my first ever attempt at writing about videogames.

So was writing something that you were naturally drawn to as a kid?
Not necessarily writing itself. I made a bit of a dog's dinner of my GCSEs in school because I was too much of a videogame addict, I didn't even get a GCSE in English. What happened was, I used to write my own game reviews in my textbook. So rather than writing the essays that we were given, I'd just write reviews of my own games, and then I would show these reviews to all my mates. But I wrote a letter to *CVG* when I was about 13, asking them for some help, and it got in Yob's mailbag, and because I was really poor – I couldn't write for toffee – they just took the piss, basically. When I won the European Sega Championships, that's when lots of doors opened, including *Sega Power*, where I started my career.

So that was freelance, and you were only 15 when you started doing that, right?
Yeah. I met Andy Smith, who was the editor of *Sega Power*, in Monaco, because he was there writing about the European Sega Championships. So we just became friends, he offered me some freelance writing, a one-page column every month called Curly's Challenge, which was just setting some high scores, challenging readers to try and beat me.
I'd won a trip to go to Sega Japan for winning the European Sega Championships – I got to meet the president of Sega, I got first access on about 20 games that nobody had even heard of, got to hold the Mega-CD for the first time, you know? It was real, super access. So they asked me to write a piece about that trip to Japan, that was my first-ever commissioned piece. So that kind of started things off.

You didn't do that for too long though, right?
What happened was, I was freelancing for *Sega Power* for 18 months, maybe two years, but I had a bit of a falling out with Andy Smith at the time. When we were filming *GamesMaster* series two, Dave Perry, the 'Games Animal', was doing commentary with Dominik Diamond. During filming, me and Dave were outside and he said, "Can I take a picture of you reading a *Sega Pro* magazine?" And I went, "No, of course you can't, I work for *Sega Power*." And he said, "Oh, I'm not going to use it." I think I was only 16-17, it never occurred to me, why would he want to take a picture of me reading his magazine if he wasn't going to use it? So I did, and he put it on the front cover of *Sega Pro*, even though I was freelancing for their direct rival. So because of that, I had a really bad falling out with Andy, and that was the end of my videogame journalism career for about seven years. I just drifted off into development after that.

FEATURE
HALLOWEEN SPECIAL
THE SEVEN DEADLY GAMING SINS
Gaming may be heavenly, but some games are going straight to hell...
Games. Just a bit of harmless fun, right? Wrong! Some games are naught but sinners and shall be targetted by Beelzebub and burned in the fires of Hades for their heinous crimes!
We have the games that fall into the trap of original sin in our sights and it's our moral duty to strike them down for the terrible dogs that they are. Think Lara Croft and Pac-Man are innocent game stars? Wrong! Think that collecting monkeys is a fun, family hobby? Wrong! Our Gaming Inquisition has carefully sought out the seven most evil games, and now it's time to get Biblical on their asses...
SLOTH
THE SIN: Being a slow-moving, arboreal, edentate mammal of the Bradypodidae family. Or, according to our dictionary, a group of bears. More likely, though, it's avoiding all kinds of work.
THE SINNER: Sorcerer's Maze. It's a perfectly good game, but then it was a perfectly good game when it was called Prism Land. Giving it a new name and a new cover and palming it off as a whole new game is the ultimate in Sloth.
THE PUNISHMENT: An odd one this since the Slothful get thrown into snake pits. This sounds a bit rough, except for the fact that snakes generally only attack if they feel threatened and there's not much less threatening than some slothful type having a nice snooze. That means they're probably perfectly safe. We think it's time for an update – ship out the snakes and drop in a load of high-speed conveyor belts with large bacon slicers at the business end. That'll make the buggers move, by crikey!
PRIDE
THE SIN: Well, someone's a bit full of themselves. Pride is an excessive belief in your own abilities, sometimes going by the name of Vanity. And wouldn't you just know it, it's often called the sin from which all others arise. Quite a biggie, then.
THE SINNER: Tomb Raider. Why? Simple. Tomb Raider was a wonderful game the first time round. It did rather well. So what did Eidos do to celebrate this success? They made a bunch of sequels that barely improved on the original and counted on everyone buying them because Lara Croft looked a bit saucy.
THE PUNISHMENT: The traditional punishment for Pride is being broken on a wheel. We'll go for that, with the added torture of being pelted with unsold copies of Angel of Darkness.
GLUTTONY
THE SIN: Feeling hungry? Well, that's just fine and dandy – gobble away! Consuming more than you actually need, though, that's not so good. That's Gluttony, and that's a sin.
THE SINNER: Pac-Man World. Almost a no-brainer, this. We all love Pac-Man, but come on! What's the deal with the unstoppable consumption? All he does is run around, guzzling pills. Let's not even start on this strange desire to eat pills and not actual food... the Gluttony's enough to condemn the round yellow one to one of Hades' more interesting pits.
THE PUNISHMENT: We're not sure how much of a punishment this actually is. Gluttons are force-fed rats, toads and snakes. We don't reckon that would pose much of a problem to Pac-Man, really. Anyone who can neck that many pills without a glass of water must have a cast-iron stomach, so we're forcing him to eat himself instead.
LUST
THE SIN: Well, it's... Come on y'know. Wanting to, er... Look, ask your dad. Or your mum. A policeman, even!
THE SINNER: Fear Effect 2. You know why. No, don't play the innocent with us. You know why.
THE PUNISHMENT: Down in Hell they're well up for smothering the lustful in fire and brimstone. Brimstone, in case you're wondering, is sulphur. It's quite plentiful down in Hell, apparently. The whole place must smell like one of Curley's guffs, and that's a pretty harsh punishment in itself. Take our word for it.
ENVY
THE SIN: Does exactly what it says on the tin. Envy's the desire for other people's stuff – their abilities, their status, their toys, their copy of Mr Driller.
THE SINNER: The Nate. It's almost sad, really. But not that sad. It seems as if someone at Sunsoft took a look at Resident Evil and thought, "Hey! We can do that!" Except they did it in a hilariously cack-handed way. Most notable for being condemned as 'Terrible' across the board in our review box, it deserved the derision for graphics, bad sound, bad story, bad puzzles... bad everything, really.
THE PUNISHMENT: The envious have a pool of freezing water waiting for them in Hell. That sounds a bit namby-pamby to us, so we'll settle for a pool of liquid nitrogen instead.
GREED
THE SIN: Not to be confused with Gluttony, obviously. Greed's all about grabbing as much stuff as you can and not giving one jot about anything else. Being Greedy, it's also nabbed a couple of extra names for itself – Avarice and Covetousness.
THE SINNER: Ape Escape. Look, we all love monkeys. We'd all love to have our own monkey, wouldn't we? But just the one. Maybe two, at a push. After all, you wouldn't want your monkey to get lonely while you were off doing important stuff, or once you'd got a bit bored with its simian capers. But Ape Escape goes too far. What the hell would anyone want with all those monkeys? It's just not on.
THE PUNISHMENT: Boiling oil. Just like last month's Justice. Yep, the Greedy are, quite literally, boiled alive in oil. Those poor monkeys!
ANGER
THE SIN: Also known as Wrath. You know all about it. It's the deadly sin of those who spurn love and opt for fury. Or those who've stubbed their toe on something. Or who think someone's looking at them funny. There's a lot of it about, frankly.
THE SINNER: Tekken 2. Actually, we just put Tekken, Tekken 2, Tekken 3, Bushido Blade, Mortal Kombat, Street Fighter and every other beat-'em-up in a big pile and picked one out at random. Is there any need for all this rage? Why can't everyone just talk it out and be friends? The world would be a much better place. All right, so games might not be so much fun, but it's a small price to pay.
THE PUNISHMENT: The Angry and the Wrathful get dismembered alive. This may sound a bit harsh, but we figure the Tekken mob are used to that sort of thing anyway.
seven
D22 OFFICIAL UK PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE NOV 2003

» Fun features like this were staples of *Official UK PlayStation Magazine* in its later years.

How was it, going into the development side of the business?

I'd just left school, I didn't have any GCSEs. I was offered a job as a games tester at Tiertex. Games testing is the lowest job there is, but I was only 16 when I started, and yeah, it was good. I mean, game testing is not a good job. It's not like being a games journalist, where you get to play a new game every few days, and these games are finished, and a lot of them are really good. These games are full of bugs and crashing, and you play the same games for months on end, it drives you crazy. You want to step up the ladder, get into designing levels and then eventually designing the games. But you know, that takes a long time to get up to that level.

> "These games are full of bugs and crashing, and you play the same games for months on end, it drives you crazy"
> DAN CURLEY

The last game I worked on was *Tunnel B2*, which never came out. I was there for three months, the studio Neon went bankrupt – Infogrames pulled the contract, so *Tunnel B2* got cancelled, and I was out of work for maybe 14-15 months. So that's when I decided to have a pop at *PlayStation Zone*, which was my first full-time job in games magazines. It was in Stockport as well, which was handy because I was in Manchester.

To tell the truth, it's not a magazine we remember seeing back in the day...

Let me be honest – *PlayStation Zone* was a piece of shit. It was one of the worst magazines imaginable. I was deputy editor, but I wasn't like number two of a massive editorial team, I was number two on a team of two, and the magazine was terrible. We had no freelancers. We had to rush it out. It looked like garbage. We only had one art editor for a week to put the entire magazine together. He comes in for one week and he has to lay out 100 pages, so it looked terrible.

The thing is, when I started on *PlayStation Zone*, I couldn't really write. I mean, I had a bit of a way with words, but my grammar was abysmal. My spelling was abysmal. I didn't even know the difference between there, their and they're – that's how poor my English was. I must have given the production editor so many sleepless nights and migraines, because every time I would print off a walkthrough for him, it would come back 90% red, right? And we're talking a 20,000-30,000-word walkthroughs, not a 500-word review or preview. This production editor, he was ex-newspaper – like an old-school pinstripe suit kind of journalist, you know, yellow fingers from constantly

My FAVOURITE MAGAZINE COVER

"I always remember this one of Crash on a surfboard for our summer issue, that was a really good cover that I liked," says Dan, choosing issue 101 of *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*. "It was something that we commissioned, it wasn't assets that we got off Sony. We actually paid an illustrator £500-£600, so there was our own Crash on a surfboard cover. That was a really nice cover."

I REMEMBER WHEN

INTERVIEW INTERROGATION

"Rich Keith gave me that interview [for *Official PlayStation Magazine*], and I just got ripped to pieces. He was asking me questions like, "Can you give me an example of when you've researched a feature that you've commissioned out to a freelancer?" because I put 'deputy editor, *PlayStation Zone*' on my CV. I was just number two on a tips mag, I wasn't a proper deputy editor at the time, so I was way out of my depth."

My WALKTHROUGH WRANGLE

"I wrote a walkthrough for *Phantasy Star III*. Now I was expecting to get paid £50 a page, which is what the going rate was, even back in 1991 or 1992. It was a ten-page walkthrough with hand-drawn maps. Remember, no internet – this is all fresh, me doing it raw. That took weeks, and instead of getting paid £500 for it, they gave me tip of the month, like it was just a reader's contribution rather than proper freelance writing. So I caused a bit of a stink, you know what I mean? Even to this day, I still mention it to Andy Smith and Neil West. Apparently it was Neil that tried to rip me off, because their freelance budget ran out that month. It's just fun and games now, but it was a bit of a piss take."

SEGA JAPAN
SEGA POWER IN JAPAN
When Danny Curley won the European Sega Challenge, he also collected what is surely the ultimate prize - a chance to visit the Sega headquarters in Japan
HOW DID IT ALL GET STARTED, THEN?
If you think Sega started in 1576 as a launderette, you'd be wrong!
INTO THE ARCADES!
The CYBER DOME arcade machine is more like a cinema than a coin-op!
Lunar Park has some of the world's most advanced arcade hardware

» Dan's trip to Japan, as documented in *Sega Power*, really was the stuff of dreams.

» Dan credits the oft-forgotten *PlayStation Zone* with helping him develop as a writer.

chain-smoking in the office, and he whipped me into shape. *PlayStation Zone* was almost like my degree in English, just on a crappy tips mag that no one ever heard about. So as poor as that magazine was, I've got a soft spot for it.

Those guides sound absolutely enormous. How long were you given to put them together?

It would depend on the game. Obviously, an RPG, you would basically get an entire issue. I think the most time I ever spent on one guide was *Breath Of Fire III* – I had to do it in one four-week thing, and I did it in one go. *PowerStation* was one of our competitors, but *PowerStation* was bigger, it had more money, it sold a lot more. But I noticed they did it over three issues, so I was definitely working harder than they were. This is before the internet, when writing a guide was a real pain in the ass. There was no Googling, there was no GameFAQs – obviously you're writing walkthroughs for games that haven't come out yet, usually. So it's just you versus the games, very different to how it might be these days.

> "This is before the internet, when writing a guide was a real pain in the ass" DAN CURLEY

You were at *PlayStation Zone* for about a year, but then you went back into the development side of things. How did that all come about?

Yeah, I had a mate called Chun Wah Kong, I used to work with him as a tester in Manchester at Software Creations. He'd moved down south to work at Sony on *The Getaway*, and he just got in touch with me and said, "We need a writer, someone that's got some writing experience and some development and design experience." So he thought of me, and then I went down and had an interview with Brendan McNamara. It was a lot more money, it was in Soho rather

Iraq bomb squad
"I press the red button. It blows so loud, my nose spills blood"
"Rockets have been spotted, armed and aimed our way..."

» Here's Dan's feature for *Loaded*, going to Iraq. We wouldn't have the bravery… [Copyright: *Loaded* magazine]

Interview

Due out this summer, Discworld Noir is the third and latest game based on Terry Pratchett's weird and wonderful Discworld books. We took a trip down to Salisbury, Wiltshire, the home of the great man himself, to talk about games, books, turtles and life.

A Merry Chat With Terry Pratchett

DISCWORLD NOIR

10

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My MEMORABLE INTERVIEW

Despite being a tips magazine, *PlayStation Zone* was offered the chance to interview Terry Pratchett when *Discworld Noir* came out. As a big fan of the *Discworld* books, Dan jumped at the opportunity. "One of the things that I remember the most was asking him, 'Do you envision a future where *Discworld* primarily involves a videogame, with book transcripts to follow?' He did not like that question one bit," Dan recalls. "He stood up, walked off to the food buffet, grabbed some nuts in just stone cold silence. After it ended, he gave all of the game journalists some Dwarf bread, except me." Worse yet, Dan lost his dictaphone on the train home!

than Stockport. So I just went back to London and worked on *The Getaway* for a year.

It didn't really work out. Writing a script for a storyline is very different to writing copy for a magazine. I think *The Getaway* had a good story, but I think that was more luck, because I'd never done any classes in screenwriting or storytelling, and I didn't really know what I was doing. I didn't get on with Brendan, I couldn't stand working with him. I didn't think the game was going to get released, which it did, but I thought "bollocks" and just left. I got a one-way flight to Ibiza, and just spent three or four months handing out flyers and getting drunk every night. When I came back from Ibiza, I was a push bike courier just cycling around London, 100 miles a day. I didn't know what I was doing at that point. I was lost, my career was lost.

Wow, so how did you manage to get things back on track?

I really wanted to stay in London, but if I wanted to go and work back in games journalism, at that time it was either Bath or Bournemouth. So I applied for a job as reviews editor on *GamesMaster* magazine with Robin Alway. I had an interview in Bath, I didn't get it, and then I applied for a job as deputy editor of the *Official UK PlayStation Magazine*, which I would end up working for eventually, but not yet. However, Rich [Keith] got in touch with me about a week or two afterwards, saying, "Do you want to come and freelance for us?"

Now at this point, I hadn't freelanced for Future since 1992, and this was 2001. Putting aside *PlayStation Zone*, I haven't done any proper kind of games journalism, like writing news, reviews, features. This was quite a big step so Rich commissioned me to write a monthly news column called The Hack which was brilliant. It had to be three news stories every month that were proper exclusives. Because I used to work at Sony and because I spent a lot of time in development, I had a lot of friends in development, where I could get information that no one else had. I found out that Sony was working on a handheld before anybody else had announced it, from a big cheese at Sony – he told me, "We're working on a handheld, don't say my name," which, of course, they didn't.

Things just kind of exploded from there, a staff writer job came up on *Official PlayStation* and a magazine called *XGamer*, a new Xbox launch magazine. Rich Keith found out I'd applied for *XGamer* and said, "Don't work for them. Come and work for us, you can have the job on *Official PlayStation Magazine* without even an interview. We'll just give it to you, just move down to Bath." Obviously this was the launch of the Xbox compared to the PlayStation, which was dying out at this stage, so this is how I ended up on *XGamer*.

That must have been pretty exciting, what with Microsoft coming in and shaking up the gaming landscape?

It was a full-time job moving to Bath, a new console, some big, impressive-looking games, you know, *Halo* obviously being the main one. I worked there for nine months, and then – at the time, Future Publishing had the *Official PlayStation 2 Magazine* in Bath. Future also

> "I had a lot of friends in development, where I could get information that no one else had"
> DAN CURLEY

I REMEMBER WHEN

REVIEWS FROM BEYOND

"I think my favourite bit of that final issue was the *OPM* Everlasting Reviews Ouija Board. That was me and Jim that came up with that. You would summon the spirit of *Official PlayStation Magazine* to review your games for you – genius! And it had some really funny comments on it."

My FUTURE CLASSIC

HORIZON ZERO DAWN

"I would say *Horizon Zero Dawn*," replies Dan when asked which game he thinks will stand the test of time. "I thought that was a mind-boggling game, definitely my game of that generation. I thought the game design was phenomenal. I thought the mechanics, the combat, the way that the machines work and broke apart for it was just sublime. I thought the storyline was incredible. So yeah, *Horizon Zero Dawn*'s probably my best game in the last ten years."

» Dan wasn't a fan of *XGamer*'s lads' mag redesign into *Xbox Gamer*.

I REMEMBER WHEN

AGES APART

"When Darran came over from Highbury, **Retro Gamer** and *360* were sat next to each other. I just found it amusing that Darran's going to be writing about Spectrum games and Master System games and NES games, where we're on a magazine for a console that hasn't even come out yet. And what's amusing to me now is that 20 years on, that 360 is now considered a retro-gaming machine. Doesn't time fly?"

wanted to get the official Xbox licence from Microsoft, but they were worried that it would piss Sony off, so they created this new division called FXMI and they set it up in London at the Baker Street office. FXMI decided they wanted *XGamer* to come over to London and be a part of that division. It was all very political.

Now, the thing is, I hated Bath. I didn't have any friends there. I didn't really get on with my editor very well. So they said to everybody on the magazine, "You can move to London." Nobody wanted to except me. Everyone else decided to just move on to a different magazine, so I moved to London with the magazine on my own, and they just built a new team up, and then they redesigned it as *Xbox Gamer* with a guy called Simon Clays, who used to work for *Stuff*. It was just bloody awful. The redesign was awful, I hated it. It was like *Stuff* and *T3*, where you would just have a woman in a bikini on the front cover with a joypad. It was just abysmal.

> "They just wanted to be like Loaded. They wanted to be lads' magazines rather than games magazines"
>
> DAN CURLEY

There was a lot of that at the time...

Yeah, I mean *PSW* was the same. They just wanted to be like *Loaded*. They wanted to be lads' magazines rather than games magazines, you know? I just thought it was bollocks. If you want to buy a PlayStation magazine, you buy a PlayStation magazine. If you want to buy a lads' mag, buy a lads' mag. I didn't get on with my editor at all. I ended up resigning, but I resigned with a gun to my head – I didn't really have any choice. Then I moved back to Bath, and that's when the *Official PlayStation Magazine* saved my life and saved my career.

That's a huge impact, especially given that the console was on death's door.

When I came back to Bath, I met Rich Keith, who always believed in me because of the work I'd done as a freelancer a year or so before. He'd just been moved onto *Official PlayStation 2*, and he told me that Mike Goldsmith, who used to be the editor years ago, was putting together a team of freelancers to finish the magazine out. So Mike emailed me, we went for an informal interview, and he just said, "What happened in London?" I told him what happened, didn't lie. And I also said, "I'm not really what you call a career videogame journalist. I want to write for *Loaded*, I want to write for lads' magazines. I just want to write, it doesn't have to be about videogames."

This was perfect for the *Official PlayStation Magazine*, because there were no games to review or preview, nothing to write news about. So we had 40 pages a month of just features, nothing was reused – we had to have a theme every issue and just come up with as much ridiculous madness as possible. So it was me, Ryan Butt and a guy called Jim McCauley. We were told, "Providing you hit your deadlines and come in on budget, the magazine will keep going for as long as you keep it in profit." So that was it.

I mean, things were really desperate. We'd have like a half-page review of some £4.99 Midas game, but we were just writing loads of ridiculous features. It was such a good laugh – no overtime, no stress, no politics. It was fantastic, one of my favourite jobs I've ever had. Even Steve Jarratt, Mike Goldsmith, Rob Pegley, they were all reading and contributing to the magazine. They loved it, because they were editors on the mag when it was selling hundreds of thousands, and it was a big part of how Future became a big publishing company. We were the pallbearers, so they wanted to make sure it was taken out and buried with care.

Feature
Foreign Exchange
Foreign Exchange
Annoyed that Europe always seems to get everything last? With a thriving import market out there, 360 takes a look at shunning the high street in favour of importing

» Dan was *360*'s features editor, and without games to cover, the mag needed plenty of features.

Once that was over, what happened next?
While I was still at *Official PlayStation*, I applied for a job at *Loaded*, which was way out of my league. I didn't get the job, I got freelance. I started wrestling alligators, went to St Moritz to do the Cresta Run, did occasional bits and bobs about pubs, court report columns. I eventually went out to Iraq for two weeks, where I was embedded with the army. I was hoping I'd get a full-time job at *Loaded*, but it just never materialised. Eventually, Ryan Butt got in touch with me, saying, "My brother is setting up a brand-new publishing company in Bournemouth." And I had never met Damian at this time, but I was very good friends with Ryan.

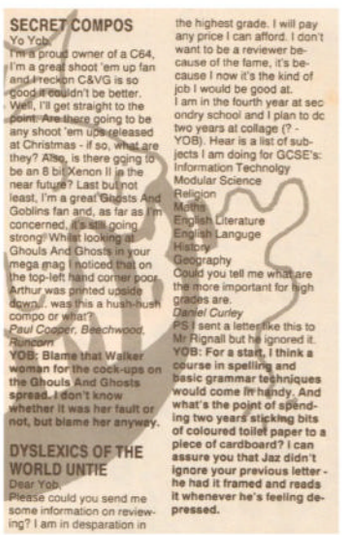
> "So I'm just freelancing now, so I'm just kind of seeing what's out there – I've got some small irons in some small fires"
> DAN CURLEY

That was Imagine Publishing, where you went from covering a dying format to one that wasn't even out yet. But you weren't there for long. Why not, and what happened after that?
Yeah, it was doing a new Xbox 360 magazine. I came down, had an interview, and then I started on *360*. It was comical. We basically spent the first three or four months just reviewing Xbox games. It was a bit of a piss take, really. After about nine or ten months, I just decided this wasn't for me, and I left without any job or any freelance. I genuinely resigned, I wasn't pushed. I mean, everyone knew how horrifying Imagine was compared to Future.

So I applied for a job at Orange's website as games editor – this was back in London, going from like £15,000 to £40,000. After a year, maybe 18 months, I started doing less games, more TV, showbiz, general entertainment stuff. As I was getting older, early 30s, I think I just wanted to move out of games – not because I didn't like them, I just wanted to broaden my scope a little bit more. And then, for many years, I didn't do any games journalism, until about 2011.

James Artaius – he works at Future now on a camera magazine, he was editor of *360 Gamer* at Uncooked Media. He offered me some freelance, So I did quite a bit of freelance for him, over 2011 and 2012. I was living in London, and they were based in Bournemouth, so every time a preview event would come up in London, I would be the person that went and did it. I did that for a while, and eventually I got work at Channel 4, which basically was the next ten years of my life. That ended a few months ago, so I'm just freelancing now, so I'm just kind of seeing what's out there – I've got some small irons in some small fires. ✱

» Dan's favourite game to work on was *Flashback* – he wrote about it in **Retro Gamer** issue 20.



SECRET COMPOS

Yo Yob!
I'm a proud owner of a C64, I'm a great shoot 'em up fan and I reckon C&VG is so good it couldn't be better. Well, I'll get straight to the point. Are there going to be any shoot 'em ups released at Christmas – if so, what are they? Also, is there going to be an 8 bit Xenon II in the near future? Last but not least, I'm a great Ghosts And Goblins fan and, as far as I'm concerned, it's still going strong! Whilst looking at Ghouls And Ghosts in your mega mag I noticed that on the top-left hand corner poor Arthur was printed upside down!... was this a hush-hush compo or what?
Paul Cooper, Beechwood, Runcorn
YOB: Blame that Walker woman for the cock-ups on the Ghouls And Ghosts spread. I don't know whether it was her fault or not, but blame her anyway.

DYSLEXICS OF THE WORLD UNTIE

Dear Yob,
Please could you send me some information on reviewing? I am in desparation in the highest grade. I will pay any price I can afford. I don't want to be a reviewer because of the fame, it's because I now it's the kind of job I would be good at. I am in the fourth year at secondry school and I plan to do two years at collage (? - YOB). Hear is a list of subjects I am doing for GCSE's:
Information Technolgy
Modular Science
Religion
Maths
English Literature
English Langugе
History
Geography
Could you tell me what are the more important for high grades are.
Daniel Curley
PS I sent a letter like this to Mr Rignall but he ignored it.
YOB: For a start, I think a course in spelling and basic grammar techniques would come in handy. And what's the point of spending two years sticking bits of coloured toilet paper to a piece of cardboard? I can assure you that Jaz didn't ignore your previous letter - he had it framed and reads it whenever he's feeling depressed.

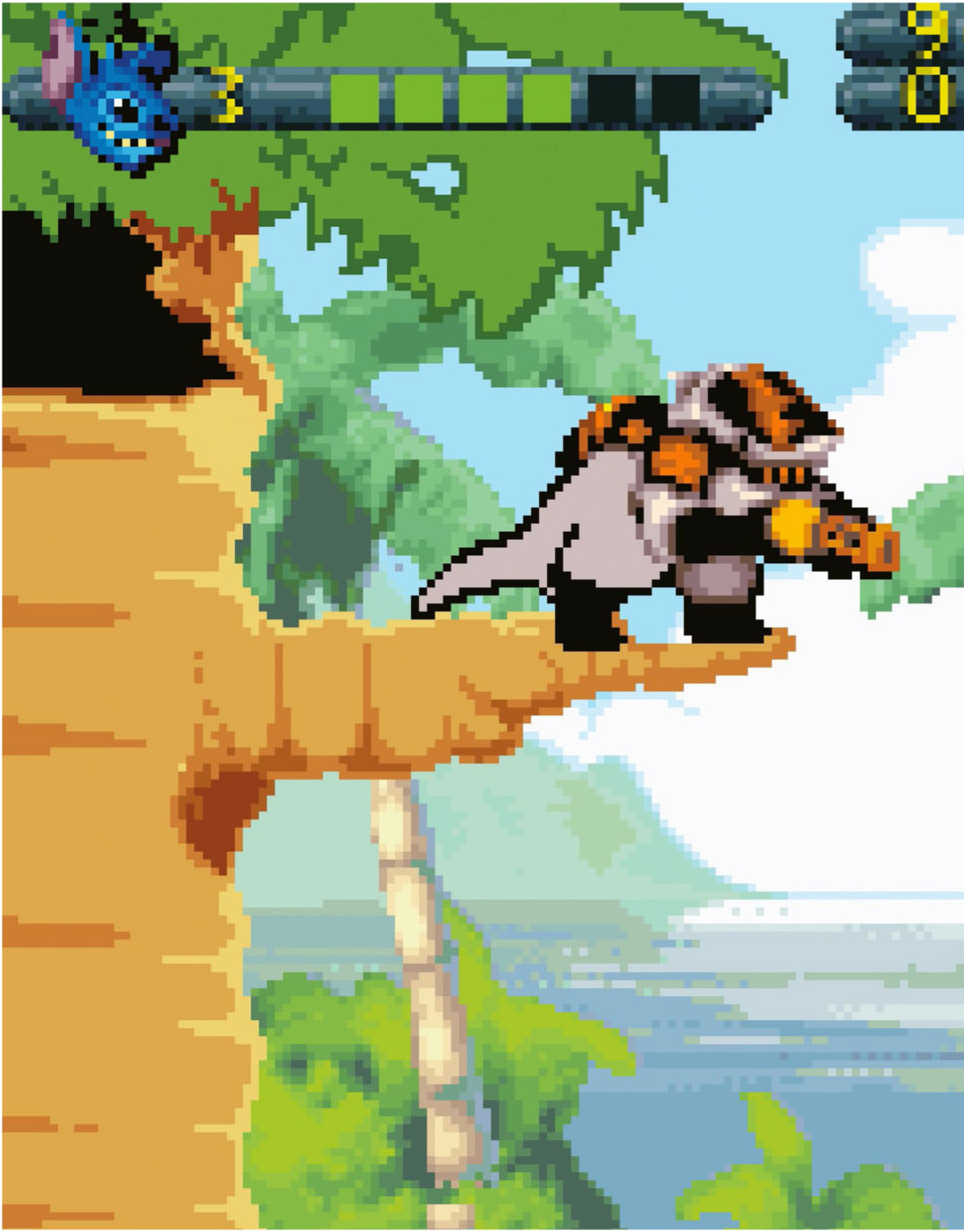
» Here's the letter to *Computer & Video Games*, in which Yob pours cold water on Dan's ambitions.

» *360* launched in the summer of 2005, well before the Xbox 360, causing difficulties for the team.

I REMEMBER WHEN

COMPETITOR ENVY

"I used to read the *Official PlayStation Magazine* when I worked on *PlayStation Zone*. And I used to think, 'My God, imagine working for that.' It was like, 200 pages, really well designed, really well written, selling 300,000-400,000 copies a month – the pinnacle of videogame publications at the time. And I used to look at my crappy PlayStation magazine that sold 25,000, which might sound a lot now, but in the late-Nineties during the PlayStation era, was abysmal. This is before broadband, and it was selling 25,000."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90

Lilo & Stitch 2

NOT JUST FOR CHILDREN

» GAME BOY ADVANCE » 2004 » CLIMAX STUDIOS

After living with me for over 30 years, my wife Melanie is used to buying me things that you wouldn't typically associate with the average 52-year-old man. When it comes to Christmas presents, I'm not big on surprises. Typically I'll simply buy everything I'd like for Christmas from Melanie and send her a bill request. It's not romantic in the slightest, but does ensure I won't fall foul of unwanted gifts.

As the packages start to arrive, Mel will open them up, inspect them (I'll often buy second-hand goods) and then put them away. Two items last year provoked a reaction from her though. "Why on Earth have you bought these bloody kids' games, Darran? Do you really want to unwrap these on Christmas day?" The games in question were *Lilo & Stitch* and *Lilo & Stitch 2* for the Game Boy Advance and I very much wanted to open them up on the big day.

The games had been on my radar ever since Mike Mika mentioned that Digital Eclipse had turned the first one into a *Metal Slug* clone, so I was eager to try it out. As fun as the original is, I'd argue that the sequel is the slightly better game. Both titles feature Lilo and Stitch as playable characters, but their sections couldn't be more different. While Lilo's are typically stealth and puzzle-based and often require a fair amount of lever manipulation, Stitch's are intense run-and-gun affairs that feel fun, frantic and chaotic to play.

While Lilo's sections are definitely weaker, they're still enjoyable and add a nice change of pace to all the intense shooting. I found myself leaning more to the sequel because Lilo's levels don't feel as slow-paced as in the original game and there's a lot more action in the Stitch sections, including some fun racing bits. Ultimately, both games prove that just because a game's primarily marketed to children, that doesn't mean us older kids can't enjoy them either. I certainly did.

>> You can tell Christmas is nearly upon us. There are five Evercade carts to review, we've taken the G'AIM'E gun for a spin and played through Ball X Pit, Double Dragon Revive, Sektori and Neon Inferno

» [Evercade] Despite the brilliance of *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves*, *NeoGeo Arcade 2* is low on quality.

Evercade Multi-Game Cartridges

BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT FINISHES 2025 WITH A BANG

INFORMATION

- **SYSTEM:** EVERCADE FAMILY
- **ALSO ON:** SUPER POCKET FAMILY
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **DEVELOPER:** BLAZE ENTERTAINMENT
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2

Although new cartridges didn't start appearing until March, 2025 remained a packed year for Blaze Entertainment and the Evercade brand in general and it's finishing things off in fine style with five brand-new carts.

First up we have *NeoGeo Arcade 2* and *3*, which feature 12 games between them. The incredible *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* can be found on *NeoGeo Arcade 2* and is arguably the highlight of an otherwise OK collection. *Metal Slug 2* is solid enough but hampered by performance issues (just like the arcade version) while *Art Of Fighting 2* and Crossed Swords are just weak games and unlikely to prove big time sinks. That leaves *Ninja Command* and *Sengoku 2*, which are both entertaining enough, but hardly big hitters.

NeoGeo Arcade 3 is a far better offering. *The King Of Fighters '97*, *Metal Slug 3*, *Twinkle Star Sprites* and *Samurai Shodown II* are all excellent, covering one-on-one fighting, as well as shmup and run-and-gun action. *Super Sidekicks* was succeeded by many better versions (which we'll likely see on later carts) but remains good fun in multiplayer, while *Ghost Pilots* is a tremendously bland take on Capcom's *1942* series. Just be mindful that both of these cartridges are far more enjoyable on the Evercade VS due to their focus on multiplayer action.

» [Evercade] *Twinkle Star Sprites* from *NeoGeo Arcade 3* really shines on Evercade, but it's even better on the Evercade VS.

BRIEF HISTORY

» The original Evercade made its debut in 2020, along with several curated collections of classic console games. Since then Blaze Entertainment has extended the brand with new hardware, higher-capacity carts for bigger games and even home-computer releases, including cartridges dedicated to the Commodore 64 and Team17.

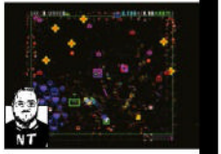
» [Evercade] *The Llamasoft Collection* features two versions of several games, including the excellent blaster *Gridrunner*.

★PICKS OF THE MONTH

DARRAN

R-Type Delta HD Boosted

A great update of an amazing PlayStation shmup with enhanced visuals and numerous quality-of-life improvements. I can't stop blasting the Bydos!



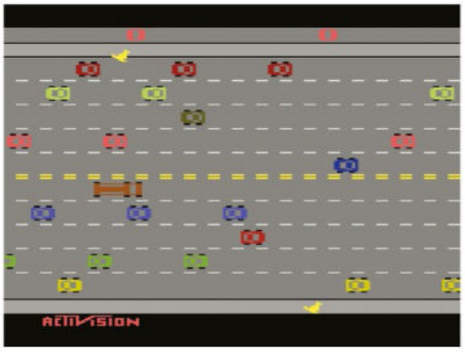
NICK

Evil Egg

Imagine layering Roguelike elements onto *Robotron*'s twin-stick shooter base, and that's *Evil Egg*. It's totally free on Steam, which frankly feels like stealing.

» [Evercade] *Sabre Wulf* is one of many Ultimate classics found on *Rare Collection 1*.

» [Evercade] It may not lack the presentation of Digital Eclipse's compilation, but *Llama Collection 1* is still an essential slice of Minter magic.



» [Evercade] There are several games on *Activision Collection 1* that work best on the Evercade VS due to only supporting two players.

Activision Collection 1 is up next and it's a decent selection of classic Atari 2600 games from the industry's first third-party publisher. The standouts are *Beamrider*, *Crackpots*, *Demon Attack*, *Enduro*, *Grand Prix*, *MegaMania*, *Pitfall!* and *River Raid* which all highlight why Activision made such a name for itself on the system and remain great fun to play, particularly *Pitfall!*, *River Raid* and *Beamrider*. The rest of the games range from poor to great and include *Fishing Derby*, *Freeway*, *Private Eye*, *Sky Jinx*, *Space Shuttle: A Journey Into Space* and *Tennis*. It's worth noting that some of these games, like *Freeway*, are two-player only.

There has been a lot of hype around *Rare Collection 1* and we'd say it easily lives up to that anticipation, even though the likes of *Donkey Kong Country* and various NES games are missing due to licensing issues. Rare's Ultimate days are represented by the excellent *Atic Atac*, *Jetpac*, *Knight Lore* and *Sabre Wulf*, and rounded off with *Gunfright*, *Lunar Jetman* and *Underwurlde*. All the versions are based on the ZX Spectrum, with the exception of *Underwurlde*, which is the C64 version. In terms of NES representation there's *Battletoads*, *Cobra Triangle* and *RC Pro-AM*, all of which remain absolute bangers. That leaves the chaotically entertaining brawler *Battletoads Arcade* and the rather average *Conker's Pocket Tales*, which first debuted on the Game Boy Color.

The last cartridge, *The Llamasoft Collection*, easily offers the best value due to featuring 27 games from the legendary Jeff Minter. There are far too many to list here but we've had a fantastic time revisiting the likes of *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, *Llamatron 2112*, *Super Gridrunner*, *Sheep In Space*, *Ancipital*, *Hover Bovver* and *Voidrunner*. It's worth noting that *Gridrunner*, *Hell Gate*, *Lazer Zone*, *Matrix: Gridrunner 2*, *Metagalactic Llamas Battle At The Edge Of Time* and *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels* all feature two versions of the game, which is a nice option to have, but does mean less overall game choice.

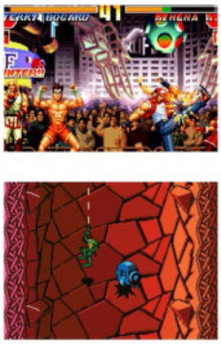
In terms of emulation, all five cartridges perform exactly how you'd expect from Blaze. We didn't notice anything unusual at all across any of the cartridges, although it's worth pointing out that the Neo Geo games all take a good while to load. They all feature the usual display options but not too many tweakable ones, so you can't change the regions on the *Metal Slugs* to get different coloured blood for example.

» [Evercade] We're unlikely to ever get bored of playing the excellent *River Raid*.

Perhaps the biggest issue that all five carts have going against them is that virtually all the games already exist in other forms, with *The Rare Collection 1* and *The Llamasoft Collection* looking particularly anaemic next to *Rare Replay* and Digital Eclipse's Llamasoft Collection, which both also feature incredible behind-the-scenes footage. On the other hand, it's hard to argue with the quality of the games being featured (outside of NeoGeo Arcade 2) and the sheer value each cart offers. ✱

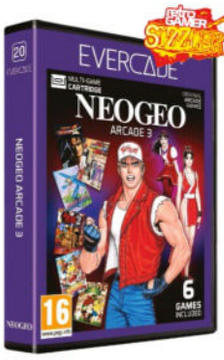
In A Nutshell

These carts don't feel quite as special as some of Blaze's earlier releases, but there's no denying that virtually all of them still offer tremendous value for money.

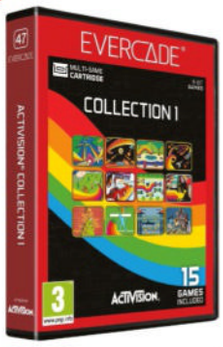


» [Evercade] *Battletoads* may by tough, but it remains an exceptionally inventive brawler.

>> Score **76%**



>> Score **90%**



>> Score **80%**

>> Score **90%**

>> Score **91%**

MORE TO PLAY

G'AIM'E Time Crisis HITS THE TARGET

INFORMATION

- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PRICE:** £99.99 (BASIC), £149.99 (PREMIUM), £199.99 (ULTIMATE)
- **PUBLISHER:** TASSEI DENKI
- **DEVELOPER:** BANDAI NAMCO
- **PLAYERS:** 1 (BASIC), 1-2 (PREMIUM/ULTIMATE)

WHY NOT TRY

▼ SOMETHING OLD
G-CON 45

▼ SOMETHING NEW
ARCADE1UP TIME CRISIS

BRIEF HISTORY

» The G'AIM'E gun is the work of Tassei Denki, which has licensed the classic arcade lightgun games *Time Crisis*, *Point Blank*, *Steel Gunner* and *Steel Gunner 2* from Bandai Namco for this mini-console. The system was fully funded ten minutes after the Kickstarter campaign launched in July 2025, raising over £850,000 overall.

GO DEEPER

The facts behind G'AIM'E Time Crisis

» All four games are the arcade versions, so extra PlayStation features for *Time Crisis* and *Point Blank* aren't included.

» The Basic package includes one gun and *Time Crisis*. Premium gets you all four games, a gun and a foot pedal, and Ultimate adds a second gun.

» If you want to upgrade a Basic or Premium system, the foot pedal costs £29.99 and a second gun retails for £69.99.

The decline of CRT displays has been a huge problem for lightgun games, and despite some valiant efforts, scratching that itch without going to an arcade has become quite difficult. The G'AIM'E gun promises to work on modern displays without any hassle, and while scepticism is understandable, the guns here really do the job – though with a few caveats.

The guns themselves are a nice size and are fairly light, despite the rumble motor that provides optional recoil, and they use cameras that employ AI models which allow them to recognise screens. That's not important to you as a player, though – all you need to do is calibrate each gun by shooting eight targets, three times each, though it does need doing every time you switch the console on. Turning on the optional crosshair, we found that the gun's aim was being tracked in a stable, accurate fashion, and remained so as long as we didn't drastically change position.

Each gun has a lengthy cable and includes a pause button and a credit button, plus A and B buttons. You can use these to hide and reload in *Time Crisis*, but the Premium and Ultimate packages include a foot pedal for a more authentic experience. This is narrower than what you'd find on an arcade cabinet, but it's responsive and the rubber feet help keep it in place. The mini-console is small and unobtrusive, and offers 1080p output via HDMI. Unfortunately, only the Ultimate package includes a plug adapter for the USB-C power cable, which is worth keeping in mind.

» [Arcade] *Time Crisis* is presented in its coin-op form, and we couldn't see any issues with it.

» The gun feels good and is visually similar to its arcade counterpart, and the pedal does the job.

You do need to be particularly mindful of your environment and equipment. The guns need distance to see the TV – at least 1.5m for small screens, 2-3m for 32"-50" screens, and 3-3.5m for those up to 65". The manual recommends avoiding glare and other displays around your TV, and that you "may enhance the product performance" by switching on your TV's game mode. Indeed, the games are so dependent on your reflexes that input lag really made a difference – game mode made a real difference to how much damage we took on the 2019 Samsung TV we used, and a laggy 2010 LG wasn't ideal at all.

As for the games, the Basic package only includes *Time Crisis* – a true classic of its genre, intense and cinematic the whole way through. Unfortunately, you can't add the other games to this package later, so we'd recommend the Premium as a minimum. *Point Blank* remains an excellent party game filled with ridiculous ways to test your speed and accuracy, and the *Steel Gunner* games are impressive examples of how effective sprite-scaling pseudo-3D lightgun games could be. In terms of options, you're limited to just difficulty and screen flash intensity adjustments.

» The Premium and Ultimate packages also include goodies such as a pin badge and diorama.

The price is steep for such a small selection of games, but they're good ones and the tech makes them more accessible than they've been in a while. If you're tempted and can accommodate the set-up, the performance is unlikely to let you down.

In a nutshell

It's not the beefiest package out there, but the G'AIM'E gun's accuracy and minimal set-up needs ensure that revisiting these arcade classics is still an absolute blast.

YOUR GAME IS NOT OVER

CONTINUE?

[Y]/[Y]

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PICK OF THE MONTH

Sektori

» **System:** PC (tested), PS5, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £11.99+ » **Buy it from:** Online

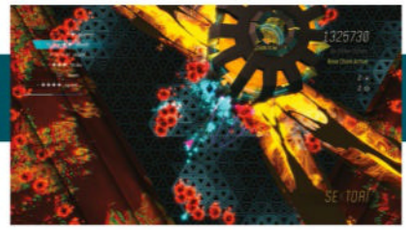
This astonishing twin-stick arena shooter is the work of Kimmo Lahtinen, who worked on titles like *Resogun* and *Dead Nation* before going independent. Stylistically, *Sektori* is similar to the popular *Geometry Wars* games but it adds fresh wrinkles with its use of a dynamically changing arena which constantly shifts in size and shape.

As play continues you'll be assaulted by countless enemies that attack in different patterns and drop Glimmers. Collect enough Glimmers and a Selector Token will spawn that will let you upgrade one of your Stack abilities that include extra shields, speed-ups, missiles and the Strike skill. The Strike is a highly useful mechanic that sends your ship surging forwards, creating a small impact that affects any enemies caught in it. Better yet, with certain ships, Striking through a token will instantly refill your Strike bar, allowing you to pull off high-scoring combos. The final part of *Sektori*'s puzzle is the Deck, a series of cards that can be taken into battle and grant additional bonuses once an Evolver Token has been picked up.

While *Sektori*'s Challenge mode is the main area of play, like *Geometry Wars*, there are numerous minigames to unlock. Gates disables firing and has you dashing through gates to destroy enemies, Crash rewards you for making good use of Strike attacks, while Assault increases in challenge the more tokens you pick up. Boss Rush is a gauntlet of *Sektori*'s fearsome mayors, Classic has a static arena and gives you a choice of increasing your firepower or your multiplier, while Surge gives you a tremendous boost in firepower whenever you pick a token up.

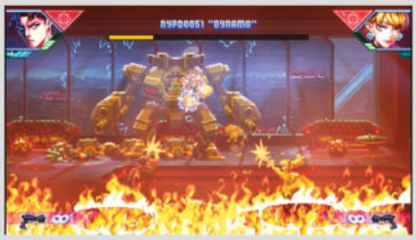
It might be too challenging for some, but *Sektori* is a stunning twin-stick shooter, with inventive mechanics and some killer bosses. Don't miss it.

>> **Score 94%**



» [PC] Pick up all the letters to spell out 'MIRAGE' and your firepower will spectacularly increase for a short time.

» [PC] *Sektori* features a pulsing techno soundtrack that's been put together by Tommy Baynen, Kimmo's brother.



Neon Inferno

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, PS5, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £15.99+ » **Buy it from:** Online

Zenovia Interactive's slick futuristic run-and-gun/gallery shooter plays like a cross between *Metal Slug* and *Wild Guns*. Filled with gorgeous pixel art and a stylish soundtrack, you play a New York assassin who takes on a series of dangerous contracts for the Family while fighting off the firepower of the NYPD. Switching between foreground enemies and those hiding in the background (as well as the ability to deflect bullets) is initially tricky to master, but once it all comes together it makes for a terrific experience. It's rounded off with some challenging boss fights, an entertaining two-player mode and the ability to replay completed stages.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 76%**

Double Dragon Revive

» **System:** PC (tested), PS4, PS5, Switch, Xbox One, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £28.99+ » **Buy it from:** Online

There's no denying the ambition of Yuke's *Double Dragon* reimagining. It's big on special moves and flashy attacks, there's the ability to smash enemies into environmental objects, it has online play, and some of the remixed tunes sound great. Unfortunately, while each character's moveset is the most comprehensive it's ever been, fighting sometimes feels stodgy and it's all too easy to not pick up weapons or hit downed enemies when they're nearby. Visually it all looks a bit dour, but there's a good range of enemies, plenty of challenges and lots of call backs to the original game. A solid, rather than exceptional update of an acclaimed series.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 68%**

Ball X Pit

» **System:** PC (tested), PS5, Switch, Xbox Series S/X » **Buy it for:** £11.99+ » **Buy it from:** Online

Survival roguelikes have become increasingly popular in recent years and this offering from Kenny Sun And Friends is a doozy. *Ball X Pit* shares elements with *Breakout* and requires your warrior to take down a wall of slowly moving enemies. Balls can be combined to create new evolutions and it's a lot of fun working out the best combinations. Once a stage is complete or you die, you head to the town building area where you place buildings and crops to unlock new characters and increase numerous abilities. It's an intoxicating loop that largely keeps repetition at bay thanks to the sheer number of unique characters and power-ups that can be unlocked.

DARRAN JONES

>> **Score 88%**

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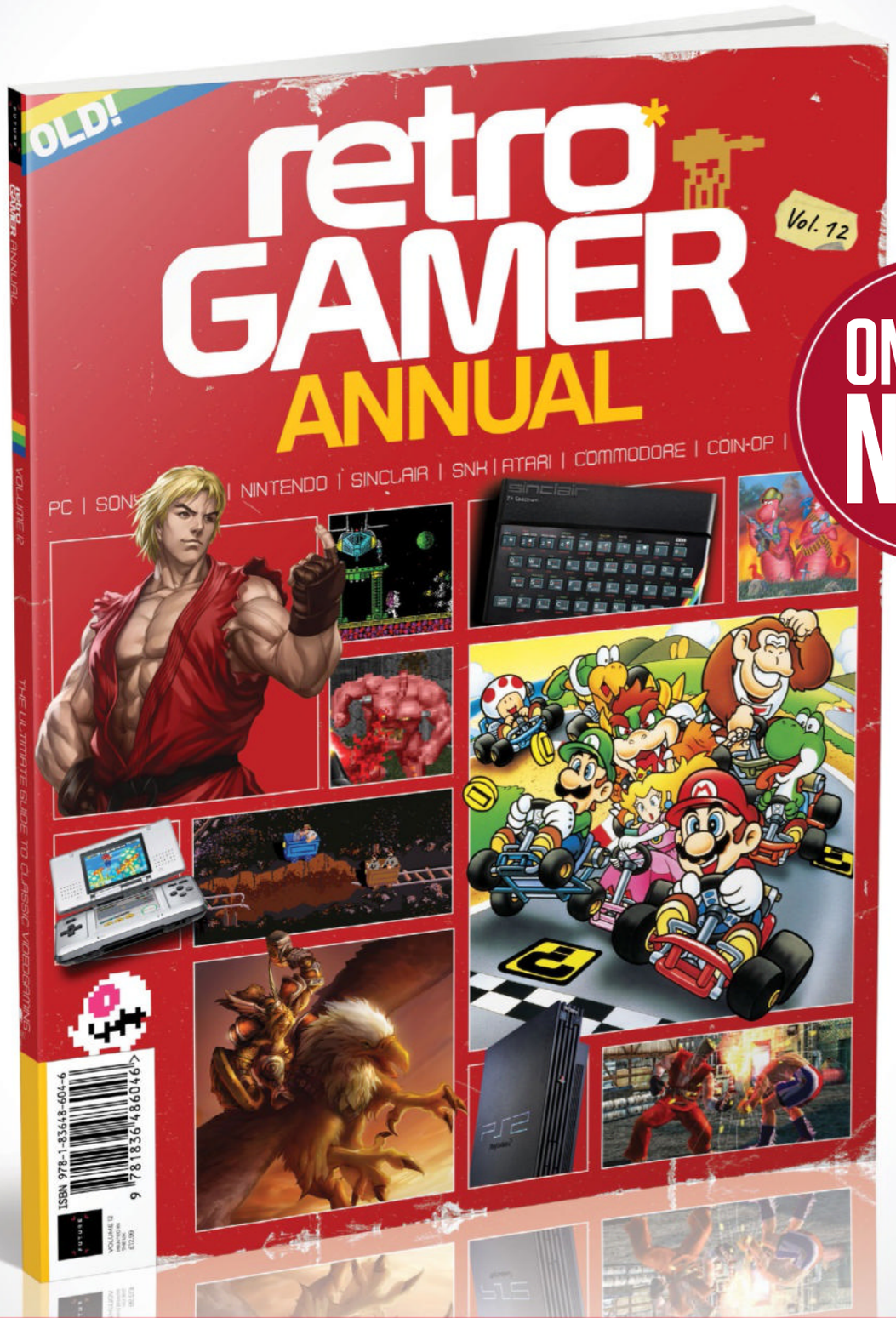
Our latest tome features an incredible amount of fantastic content from Retro Gamer's past 12 months. Iconic characters, huge franchises and classic systems all feature, making it an essential read for retro fans. Don't miss it!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THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

<YOUR MONTHLY GUIDE TO EVERYTHING HAPPENING IN THE HOMEBREW SCENE/>

<!--- [OMSX2] BREAKING THROUGH A CRACKED WALL WITH THE MORNINGSTAR. --->

<MAIN HEADER>

PERILOUS PREDICTIONS

<INTRO> MUSICIAN JORRITH SCHAAP ON CREATING NIGHTSTALKER: BLOOD OF THE ANCIENTS, AN MSX TRIBUTE TO KONAMI'S MANY CASTLEVANIA GAMES </INTRO>

<INTRO> AS WE REACH THE END OF 2025, THE HOMEBREW SCENE SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN. OUR MAIN FEATURE LOOKS FORWARD TO 2026, THE CHAMPION CODER IS WORKING ON AN AMAZING MEGA DRIVE PORT, AND SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS PREVIEWS A GAME MORE THAN 30 YEARS IN THE MAKING. WHETHER IT'S THE FORTHCOMING AMIGA PORT OF URBX WARRIORS OR IMPRESSIVE NEW BBC MICRO TITLES, WE WILL CONTINUE TO BRING YOU THE BEST NEW GAMES FOR OLD MACHINES. </INTRO>

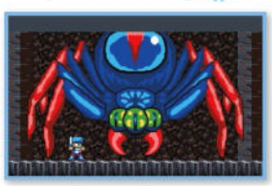
<BODY> **Dutch musician Jorrith Schaap is our guide to this spooky MSX project.** "*Nightstalker* started back in March 2024, when Frederik Boelens started experimenting with a '*Castlevania* MSX concept' engine. A homebrew game in the style of the proper *Castlevania* games has never been made on MSX. Therefore, it seems to be a great challenge to try and see what is possible nowadays." Graphics artist Joël Verdonck from Belgium, programmer Arturo Ragozini from Italy, and Patrick Smeets from the Netherlands (game and level design) have all joined together to form the group Bad Landed.

"Our target hardware is any MSX2 with 64K of RAM and 128K of VRAM. We're aiming for a physical release on a Yamanooto cartridge, which provides not only 8MB of ROM and save games, but also PSG and SCC sound," Jorrith explains. "All music is being made with Trilo Tracker SCC. We had to modify the replayer to allow for PCM sample playback during gameplay. Sound effects are made with ayFX. The game also features a spoken voice-over in the intros and in-game voice samples for player actions and casting spells. Encoders and players are custom-made by Arturo."

What can players expect from *Nightstalker*? "We try to honour the typical *Castlevania* influences yet still give it our own twist," says Jorrith. "All of the programming work happens on the PC, with a combination of VSCode, sjasm, GitHub and extensive use of openMSX, and all its debugging tools. For the

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

<INTRO> MORE GAMES TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2026... </INTRO>



MIRACLE BOY IN DRAGON LAND
(Atari ST)

<With pre-orders shipping in 2026, work continues on the *Wonder Boy*-inspired RPG, including this spider boss./>

METAL CANARY
(Dreamcast)

<Luiz Nai's bullet hell shmup is due out in Brazil in May or June 2026 and hopefully worldwide, with a built-in level creation tool./>

DRIFTIN' RAGE
(Mega Drive)

<While finalising his port of *Final Fight*, Mauro Xavier is developing a good-looking 3D racing game with multiple drivers, cars and circuits./>

SHAPESHOOTER 2000
(Jaguar)

<This Songbird Productions title mixes polygons with *Smash TV*-style arena shooting and bosses, due for release later in 2026./>

IMPOSSIBLE MISSION 3
(C64)

<With final testing underway, this long-awaited C64 sequel (see **RetroGamer** 244) features a gun to help you fight the robots./>

NEW GAMES NEEDED

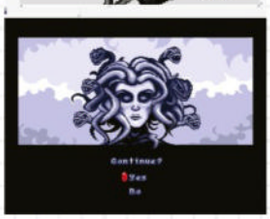
Our new email address is waiting for all your homebrew news, previews and more: **retrogamer@futurenet.com**

<!--- GRAPHICS BEING CREATED FOR THE INTRO SEQUENCE. --->

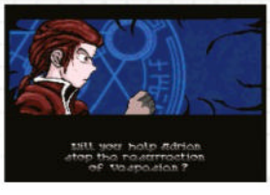
<!--- THE BAD LANDED TEAM AT MSX2 GOTO40 (L-R: MUSICIAN JORRITH, PROGRAMMER FREDERIK, DESIGNER PATRICK, AND TESTER ERIK. --->

conversion of data (sprites, graphics, tiles/maps), generating pre-computed data and the dialogue scripts, we created Python and Matlab scripts. Matlab is also used to optimise the VRAM layout. Levels are designed with a combination of Tiled (PC) and Notepad. Notepad also does a lot of the heavy lifting in general game design and tweaking of parameters. Graphics were originally made with GraphicsGale (https://graphicsgale.com), but later we switched to Asesprite to allow multiple people to contribute when necessary. We are routinely running out of room to do what we want; horizontal scrolling on a regular MSX2 is taking the CPU and VDP to their limits."

The ambitious game has a lot of support behind the scenes. "It's a real group effort," admits Jorrith. "We also have a few testers from the MSX community who provide us with valuable feedback. It's a dream come true for us to have a big box cartridge release, just like we played back when we were young. We are also considering a digital download. We have tentative ideas to try a release on Steam or a similar platform. We aim to have the game finished somewhere in (late) 2026. This is a project we do in our free time, and sometimes life gets in the way. We want to do this game justice and make it into something we can be really proud of, and that takes a lot of time and effort." For more on *Nightstalker*'s progress, head on over to badlanded.com </BODY>



<!--- MEDUSA ARTWORK BEING PLANNED OUT, AND IN PLACE ON THE CONTINUE SCREEN. --->



<!--- [INTELLIVISION] QUICKLY PICK UP THE PACKAGES AND DELIVER THEM WHILE AVOIDING HAZARDS, INCLUDING GODZILLA, IN PUMPKIN TAXI. --->

NEWS BYTES

<INTRO> ALL THE LATEST NEWS, HANDILY ARRANGED BY FORMAT </INTRO>

<**32X:** The *Ultimate Doom 32X Resurrection* patch adds the Thy Flesh Consumed episode. Get shredding at bit.ly/udoom-32x />

<**C64:** Tape and disk versions of *Rogue-ish 64* (84%, **RG** 277) are available from K&A Plus. Buy it from bit.ly/rogueish64 />

<**Game Boy Advance:** *Heartwrench Advance* is a brilliant puzzle platformer in development by Michael Chase. Play the demo at bit.ly/heartwrench-gba />

<**Intellivision:** Nanochess has released *Pumpkin Taxi* (**RG** 277) in this AtariAge thread. bit.ly/pumpkintaxi-int A physical *Pumpkin Trilogy* release is also planned. />

<**Jaguar:** *SkyFire68k* by sjc is a great shmup entering the Jag Jam 2025. Give it a try by visiting bit.ly/skyfire-jaguar />

<**NES:** Create NES games in C using the NESkit by Cutaway Shot Games, featuring conversion tools and pre-made features for platform games. Get programming at bit.ly/neskit />

<**Oric:** The Oric Software Development Kit (OSDK) is available from bit.ly/osdk-oric />

<**Picotron:** Paul Hammond's *Radar Rally* reworks the classic *Rally-X* with multiple new game modes. Bomb on over to bit.ly/rally-picotron />

<**PlayStation:** *Turbo Tihu's Twilight Night Flight* by Zhamul sees a naughty chihuahua flying around to collect treats. Play it at bit.ly/turbotihu-ps1 />

<**Sinclair Next:** Study for your degree by solving anagrams in *The Scholar* by Mark Bailey. Name your own tuition fees at bit.ly/scholar-next />

<**Windows:** *Portal 0* is a 2D reimagining of the classic Valve puzzle game. There will be cake for successful applicants at bit.ly/portal0-windows />

<**ZX Spectrum:** *Conquer The Sinclair Tower* by Rubenretro by exploring in isometric 3D and answering Sinclair-related quiz questions at bit.ly/sinclair-tower A physical cassette is also available from matranet.net />

CHAMPION CODER

SHANNON BIRT

<INTRO> SHANNON IS USING HIS IMPRESSIVE CODING SKILLS TO BRING KONAMI'S PARODIUS TO SEGA'S MEGA DRIVE. </INTRO>

<INFO FROM: NEW ZEALAND WEBSITE: @BIRT_SHANNON ON X/TWITTER FORMAT: MEGA DRIVE/GENESIS PREVIOUS GAME: LUFTHOHEIT (WORK IN PROGRESS) WORKING ON: MEGA PARODIUS />

<!--- SHANNON SHOWING OFF THE PARODIUS DEMO ON REAL HARDWARE. --->

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED, SHANNON?

<Gabriel Pryon tweeted about the Mega Drive being able to do a great *Parodius* port, even within the limitations (61 colours onscreen, normally). He did a mock-up of Level 1 artwork, and I reached out to Pryon. />

WHAT IS IT BASED ON?

<Pryon uses MAME to rip the arcade assets, then Aseprite to convert and retouch the graphics. He is currently focussing on the SFX; getting PCM samples to Mega Drive format and at the right volume level can be tricky. Vector Orbitex has been working on making the music tracks as small as possible while keeping the quality up. Luckily, SGDK's xgm2 sound driver compresses audio well. />

WHAT TECHNICAL TRICKS HAVE BEEN USED?

<The Catboss essentially needs three separate background layers; the Mega Drive only has two. The Catboss is quite detailed; his face, tail and propeller are all foreground animations, the rest are sprite animations. />

ANYTHING ELSE?

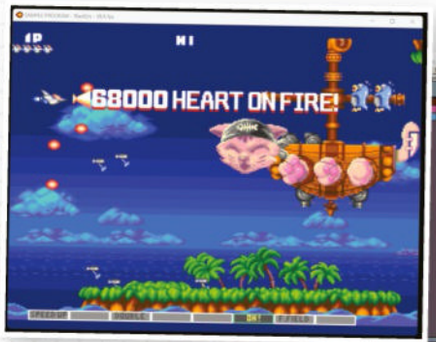
<To implement lasers, we used a demoscene technique, using the background layer and raster effects to show five full-screen-width lasers at once. We use streaming scrolling; as the screen scrolls, we only have the tiles in VRAM that are needed by that very scene. Mid-screen colour changes are used to enhance stage 1 and much more in level 2. We are using a modified SGDK and pure 68000 Assembly for object movement/collision detection for critical paths. />

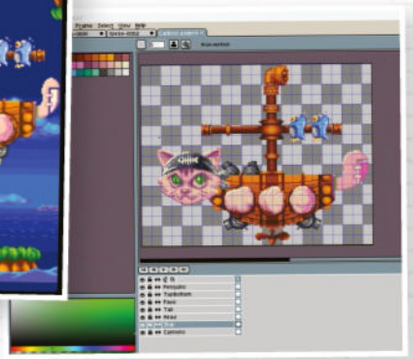
HOW IS LUFTHOHEIT (RG 259) COMING ALONG?

<Progress slowed with other projects being taken on; new tech from other projects is making its way into *Lufthoheit*. More has been done on the scaling routines. We have a new firepower type, we're working on a new Dark Forest level, and it's coming along well. />

DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER PLANS?

<I'm programming *Sword Of The Apocalypse*, a ninja-based platformer produced by Versao LDTA. Then maybe one of the *Gradius* series, as we will have the engine for it, they are similar to *Parodius*. I always wanted to do a run-and-gun game; I really enjoyed *Ultracore*. />





<!--- [PC] DESIGNING THE ICONIC CATBOSS IN ASESPRITE. --->

<!--- [MEGA DRIVE] THE CATBOSS UNDER ATTACK WITH THE WHITE BELL'S UNUSUAL TEXT-BASED FIREPOWER. --->

DATA BURST

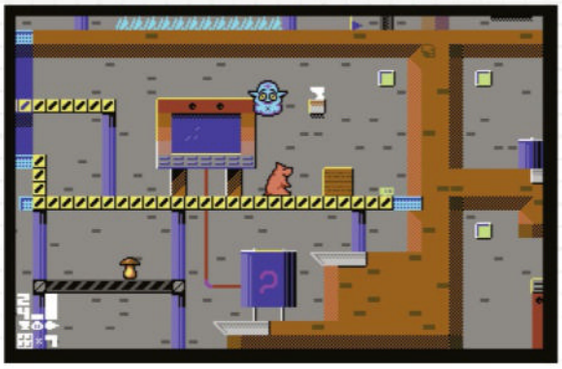
QUOD INIT EXIT IIO

<INFO FORMAT: C64 CREDITS: RETREAM (SIMONE BEVILACQUA) PRICE: DIGITAL DOWNLOAD $8.99 WEB: BIT.LY/QIE-C64 />

<BODY> **On planet Suinio, the Evil Masters have turned all the toilets into tiny potties.** Zampo The Pig must collect them all across five levels (Factory, Towers, Fun Park, Cliffs and the Fortress), returning them to Cotechina The Witch to turn back to full size. Zampo is constantly hungry and needs to eat the food items that appear on the screen. Switches and keypads will open barriers, while portals move Zampo between sections but can only be used once. Flags act as checkpoints – the most recent one touched is where Zampo returns when he takes damage from a hazard or enemies. Additionally, collecting the Spinach Tin activates Pig-Of-Steel mode, allowing Zampo to kill the Evil Masters, while hidden tiles in each level activate Pig-Of-Gold mode, making Zampo invulnerable to enemies (touching any other hazards ends the mode). Collecting Gasorade bottles fills Zampo's turbo meter, allowing him to Turbofart across large gaps. The stylish backgrounds use the C64's rarely-chosen ECBM mode, and the overlaid sprites have lots of detail, while the music and sounds work well. One drawback is that the large, complicated first level might put you off. The clever puzzles and platform action are worth experiencing, with plenty of depth to this good-looking game. Oh, and if you didn't know, the Latin title means "whatever goes in, must come out". </BODY>

SCORE: 88%

<!--- [C64] AMONG THE CLEVER GRAPHICAL EFFECTS IS THE WAY ZAMPO TRAVELS THROUGH THIS PIPE (ALSO MAKING HIM IMMUNE TO ENEMIES. --->



NEW GAMES NEEDED

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<!--- [MASTER SYSTEM] GRAPPLE THE OXYGEN CYLINDER FOR EXTRA AIR, BUT BE CAREFUL NOT TO GRAB THE WALLS. --->

<!--- [MASTER SYSTEM] THIS CONVEYOR BELT MOVES YOU TO THE RIGHT, AND THE ENEMY CAN BE STUNNED WITH THE HOOK. --->

ASTRO CLIMBER

<INFO FORMAT: MASTER SYSTEM CREDITS: BADCOMPUTERO (DEVELOPER), LOVEPENGUIN (MUSIC) PRICE: FREE DOWNLOAD WEB: BIT.LY/ASTRO-CLIMBER />

<BODY> **Released to mark the 40th anniversary of the Sega Mark III's Japanese launch, astronaut Gary must reach the escape pod at the top of Frontier Prime station before his oxygen runs out.** Gary can jump and use his grapple hook to pull himself up to platforms or grab extra oxygen bottles (giving an extra ten seconds of oxygen). Later levels add patrolling enemies, which can be stunned with the hook, and turret guns to complicate things. Conveyor belts push Gary in the direction they move, and collapsing platforms fall apart. Two continues let you resume at higher levels. This is good fun, and is brilliantly presented with great music and a gradually increasing difficulty curve. It bodes well for Adam's forthcoming shmup *Razing Core*. </BODY>

SCORE: **85%**

<!--- [NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] MR ROBOT GOT TOO CLOSE TO THE SPIKES, WITH THE FRUIT-EATING MONSTER ON PATROL. --->

<!--- [NEO GEO POCKET COLOR] AN EXPLODING PINEAPPLE TAKES OUT A HOMING ENEMY, WHILE THE LASER GUN WAITS ON THE EDGES. --->

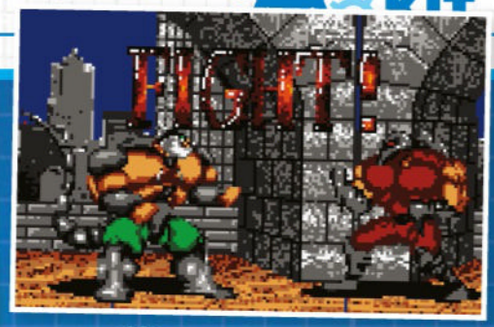
DON'T DIE, MR ROBOT

<INFO FORMAT: NEO GEO POCKET COLOR CREDITS: CHRIS AHCHAY (CONVERSION), INFINITE STATES (ORIGINAL GAME) PRICE: FREE WEB: BIT.LY/DDMR-POCKETCOLOR />

<BODY> **Collect fruit. Avoid Enemies. Don't Die.** That simple tutorial text belies how addictive this game can be, following earlier iOS and Steam versions. With three difficulties and a choice of colour for Mr Robot, skilled players will learn to 'skim' close to enemies to earn extra 'danger' points. Fruit explodes when collected, hopefully causing a chain reaction and knocking out enemies; watch out for the giant red fruit-stealing enemy and lasers firing from the screen edges. Check out the spin-off puzzle game Fruity Pals' Revenge (bit.ly/fruity-pocketcolor) for more free fun. </BODY>

SCORE: **84%**

THE HOMEBREWER'S KIT

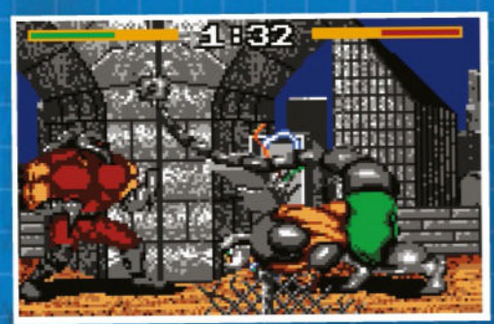


PROCESSING

<INTRO> SONGBIRD PRODUCTIONS IS REVIVING ULTRAVORE, A LYNX BEAT-'EM-UP THAT STARTED DEVELOPMENT SOME 30 YEARS AGO </INTRO>

<BODY> **Beyond Games created the Jaguar beat-'em-up *Ultra Vortek* in 1995, combining digitised actors and stop-motion models converted into digital characters.** Founder Kris Johnson originally planned a Lynx conversion, but in 2000, Songbird's Carl Forhan purchased the rights and renamed it to *Ultravore*. "I have the complete source code for *Ultravore*, and it's 100% 65C02 assembly," we're told. "Part of the challenge is parsing what the code is doing, as there are few comments. I'm using the original Epyx toolchain (which only works on Amiga machines) to build the code, then I test either on emulators or real hardware."

The demo offers one player versus the console or two players using the ComLynx cable. "The two characters currently in the game, Venom and Razorback, are the ones created by Beyond Games in the prototype code I received," Carl says. "I am hoping to add more fighters, including Grokk and Toro, completely revamped enemy AI, special moves, more backgrounds, in-game music and a simple tournament system." *Ultravore* should hopefully be released by the end of 2026. </BODY>



<!--- [LYNX] VENOM (RIGHT) UNLEASHES HIS TAIL WHIP SPECIAL ATTACK ON RAZORBACK. --->

<!--- [LYNX] NEW FIGHTERS GROKK AND TORO AS SHOWN ON THE VS SCREEN. --->

HOT TOPIC

RETROBATES MULL OVER THE SCENE'S MOST INTRIGUING ISSUES

THE THIRD DIMENSION

Which game series made the change to 3D gracefully?

DARRAN JONES

NICK THORPE

TIM EMPEY

With *Metroid Prime* starring on the cover this month, we've been thinking about how it was one of the series that managed to adapt well to the new possibilities offered by 3D graphics. Removing a successful series from its 2D roots was often challenging for developers, so it seemed like a good time to remember other games that handled the transition well.

NICK

I'm pretty sure we'd all agree that *Metroid Prime* is one of the best examples of a series transitioning gracefully from 2D to 3D, right?

TIM

Yeah, *Metroid Prime* or that game Nintendo released on the Nintendo 64, starring a plumber. I can't remember the name of it right now.…

NICK

Superb Mark 68, I think.

DARRAN

Metroid Prime blew me away when I first encountered it. Absolutely flawless transition (although that meant a lot of extra work behind the scenes). The series itself has remained consistently high as well.

NICK

Yeah, the Retro Studios team certainly didn't have an easy time of it, but it seems like Nintendo games did pretty well in general – just look at *Zelda*, too. Can you think of any non-Nintendo series that really got that jump to 3D right?

DARRAN

Yes, *Grand Theft Auto*. The third game was pretty impressive and must have sold a shed-load of PlayStation 2s.

TIM

Earthworm Jim? No. *Flashback*? No. *Pitfall*? No. *Gex*? Nah.

DARRAN

Fade To Black was a little too ambitious for its own good. *Earthworm Jim 3D* simply felt too empty, although a lot of 3D games that started off as 2D games suffered from that. I know they get a lot of flack, but I feel the N64 *Castlevania*s aren't bad, especially the second one.

TIM

Oh I got one! *Final Fantasy*, from *VII* onwards, obviously.

NICK

A couple that spring to mind for me as doing it well are ones that didn't make the jump too soon – *Ninja Gaiden* and *Fallout* both skipped the rough early 3D era.

DARRAN

Learning from the mistakes made early on I'd imagine. I actually think the *Goemon* N64 games are pretty good as well. I didn't really play many *Final Fantasy* games, but *VIII* left a big impression on me at the time. Also, there was this little game called *Metal Gear Solid*.

NICK

I remember enjoying *Goemon* on the N64, but I wasn't familiar with the SNES games at the time. Likewise, I had no familiarity with pre-PlayStation *Metal Gear* back then.

» [Nintendo 64] Konami doesn't get enough credit for how well *Goemon*'s 3D debut went.

DARRAN

That's a fair point. Trust me, they were good. Is it wrong to suggest that Nintendo were pretty important in nailing a lot of crucial 3D factors with the N64? Look at both *Zelda* and *Mario* for example.

TIM

You haven't mentioned *Sonic*, Nick. Why's that?

NICK

Because if I get started talking about how *Sonic Adventure* was actually a really good jump to 3D, we'll have to add another spread!

DARRAN

Maybe if you only played the on-foot sections… Anyway, I want you to both agree with me on the N64 thing.

» [Xbox] *Out Run* shines in 3D – but to be fair, racing games didn't often struggle with the transition.

» [Dreamcast] Can you tell Nick chose the screenshots? *Sonic Adventure* was always good, though.

» [PlayStation 2] It's hard to imagine *GTA* being so successful had it not gone 3D.

TIM

Sure, Nintendo had an incredible start in 3D with *Zelda* and *Superb Mark 68*.

NICK

Yeah, there's definitely plenty to be said in favour of that. Even the less celebrated stuff like *Wave Race 64* does really cool things with the water physics.

DARRAN

It felt like those water physics were the benchmark for years. The *Fire Emblem* series had a good transition. *Advance Wars*, not so much.

TIM

Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time made a damn good first leap, then stuffed the landing with the sequels.

NICK

We've all collectively agreed to forget *Prince Of Persia 3D* then, right? Good.

DARRAN

Sands Of Time was so good, it made Tim forget about *Prince Of Persia 3D*. That's how good it is. I feel we should give *Pro Evo* and *FIFA* some credit too.

NICK

Yeah, 3DO *FIFA* was really well regarded back then, and *Road Rash* was too. I was just thinking, it's funny how fighters like *Mortal Kombat* and *Samurai Shodown* tried 3D mechanics and ended up returning to the 2D plane.

DARRAN

A lot of iconic shmups struggled too, although *R-Type Delta* was an absolute banger (and now has a slick HD update).

» [PlayStation] The old 2D *Metal Gear* games were pretty obscure by the time *Solid* came along.

> "It felt like those water physics were the benchmark for years"
> **DARRAN JONES**

NICK

That's a point, *Rainbow Cotton* was not a good time compared to the lovely 2D games before it. Sometimes, it seems best not to overcomplicate things – look at *OutRun 2*. All it needed was some pretty scenery and drifting, and it was great.

DARRAN

I can't believe we've got through this discussion and I've not mentioned *OutRun 2*. I need to hang my head in shame. Or play *Bubsy 3D* for penance.

» [PlayStation 2] *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time* erased the memory of its dodgy 3D predecessor for Tim.

» [Nintendo 64] We're all big fans of Superb Mark, Nintendo's famous electrician from Slough.

» [3DO] It was amazing to see *FIFA* looking like this, just a year after its Mega Drive debut.

READERS REACT

Which games made the best transition from 2D to 3D?

chentzilla.bsky.social
Duke Nukem was basically *Super Mario* with a gun and suddenly he's an action B-movie hero on an action B-movie set.

Chris Jowett
I remember playing the Dreamcast kiosk in Toys R Us and was totally blown away by *Sonic Adventure*, it was amazing! (Still is in my humble opinion.)

Rees
My friends and I used to love *Worms 3D* on the OG Xbox back in the day. The jetpack in particular was loads of fun.

Forgotten Worlds
Dragon Quest VIII was an amazing leap for the series. Being able to explore a storybook world of castles and dragons in full 3D makes it one of my all-time PS2 favourites.

CrazyGroupTrio
Rayman to *Rayman 2* was a fantastic jump. It was done so well if you hadn't heard of *Rayman 1* you would've assumed it was also 3D to have led up to the quality *Rayman 2* had.

N64 Magazine Quotes
Nintendo navigated this miraculously during the 64-bit era. *Pilotwings*, *Star Fox*, *F-Zero*, *Excitebike* – and most famously Super *Mario* and *Zelda* – all received updates that had no right being as good as they were.

Bill Coniglio
Wave Race immediately springs to mind with *Wave Race 64* being the most technically impressive and with water effects that have yet to be matched.

Alex Luna
Street Fighter EX was smart about transitioning the series to 3D; it updated the graphics while retaining the 2D gameplay, which was the core idea that *Street Fighter IV* ended up doing.

Robb from 8/16/32bit
Mystical Ninja on the N64 absolutely stuck the landing going from the 2D SNES titles to the brave new world of fully 3D worlds.

Chris Widnes
Grand Theft Auto. The 2D efforts were fine if not world-beating games but it was *Grand Theft Auto III* which made it one of gaming's biggest franchises.

COLLECTOR'S CORNER

READERS TAKE US THROUGH **THE RETRO KEYHOLE**

SATURN POWER ISSUE 1
"This is my original copy of *Saturn Power*, and one of my favourite magazine covers of all time."
AMOUNT PAID: £4.99
MEGA MACHINES DUMMY ISSUE
"*Mega Machines* would go on to become one of the quirkiest magazines to exist, because you read it in landscape."
AMOUNT PAID: £17.70
ULTIMATE FUTURE GAMES ISSUE 22
"Not many people know about the infamous 'Maverick Edition'. In issue 18, Future Publishing announced the closure of the magazine. It gave the idea that someone else would carry it on. The page count dwindled to just 36 pages."
AMOUNT PAID: UNKNOWN

BIO

NAME:
Marc Jowett

LOCATION:
Tibshelf, Derbyshire

ESTIMATED VALUE OF COLLECTION:
£5,000

FAVOURITE SYSTEM:
Sega Saturn

FAVOURITE GAME:
Theme Park

FACEBOOK:
@The Gaming Newsagent

A MULTITUDE OF MEGA MAGAZINES

Marc Jowett holds the front pages with his impressive Sega magazine collection

Words by Faith Johnson

While many collectors pride themselves on having lots of games and consoles, Marc Jowett prefers to focus on magazines from his youth, but it all started with the actual games. "Our first family computer was an Atari ST 1040E," he begins. "I was around six years old when I first ventured onto it and played a game called *Skweek*."

Marc quickly moved onto consoles with one game grabbing his attention. "My fondest gaming memory was obtaining the Mega Drive version of *Theme Park* in 1995. It was delayed numerous times, and I had saved my birthday money to get it. I came back from a school trip to the Netherlands, and it was waiting for me on the bed. My mum had still been looking for it!"

We then ask Marc how his love for gaming turned into his current fascination for magazines. "It stems from my dad purchasing magazines for me when I was a youngster," he explains. "I'm a huge advocate of print over digital. You can't beat reading a magazine from cover to cover and becoming absorbed. I don't get that with digital, as I often tune out and have to reread sections. I still occasionally purchase a game based on a review in an old gaming magazine. I have even added to my back catalogue this way as well. I guess I am incredibly old-fashioned."

The magazine collection is focussed mostly on Sega ones, and we ask Marc how this came about. "As my dad used to purchase whatever title was the best value, it meant I had a lot of random issues from different publishers. I decided to start filling in the gaps in my collection, which then led to attempting to complete entire sets of every single UK Sega magazine in existence, which I know is over 620 unique issues."

This endeavour has been undertaken not just by Marc, but by his close friend as well. "What makes this even stranger is that a guy called Matt got in touch with me around 15 years ago, and he was doing the same thing. This led to us forming SegaMags and attempting to complete the collections. It's hard enough for one of us to do it, but now both of us are attempting it!" Marc and Matt are close to finishing the Sega sets, but it isn't all straightforward. "The biggest problem we have is that we don't always know when some of the magazines finished. Just when we think we have a lead, we get a curveball thrown at us," he explains. "The internet wasn't the juggernaut it is now, and we have one instance in which a magazine was supposedly closed down, only for another issue of it to surface."

Marc has turned his hobby into a business and also sells magazines and books through his popular Gaming Newsagent business, which he takes to gaming conventions and markets. "In a world of digital, The Gaming Newsagent is an advocate of print," he says. "It's amazing to see so many other people still love collecting magazines and gaming books. Our mission is to help people do that as best we can by being great value for money. My girlfriend Jess is a big part of the business, and she has given me the strength to take The Gaming Newsagent to the next level."

Got an impressive collection of your own? Contact us at:
RetroGamerUK @RetroGamer_Mag retrogamer@futurenet.com retrogamermag.bsky.social

PC ZONE ISSUE 39

"Unlike digital, you cannot quickly edit a print magazine, and an issue quickly became apparent with their review of *Euro 96*. Unfortunately, it was the cover game, and a piece of paper within the issue tells us to disregard the review."

AMOUNT PAID: PART OF £300 BUNDLE

JEWEL IN THE CROWN

SATURN+ ISSUE 7

■ "An issue so rare, even Paragon Publishing denied it existed, instead telling the world that the magazine had closed after issue 6. I was incredibly lucky to stumble upon this issue, as it was accidentally labelled as issue 1."

PAID: £25

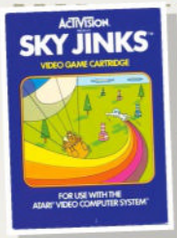
BARGAIN HUNT

Your guide to the rising world of retro prices

THE COVER STAR

METROID PRIME (GAMECUBE)

You won't need to explore your wallet too deeply to secure a copy of this excellent game. Used copies can be had for **£12,** while mint copies cost about **£25.**

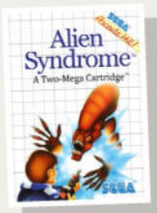


SKY JINKS (ATARI 2600)

Loose carts have recently sold for under **£10** in the USA. A good condition boxed copy will cost about **£30.** It's also on *Activision Collection 1*.

STAR WARS (ZX SPECTRUM)

The budget is strong with this classic Domark release. You shouldn't have to pay more than **£7** for the first print or *Hit Squad* versions.



ALIEN SYNDROME (MASTER SYSTEM)

Those wanting a mint copy of this solid conversion will shell out over **£45,** but incomplete boxed and loose carts can cost under **£20.**

WIZBALL (C64)

First print copies sell for over **£300,** but *Hit Squad* and later prints vary between **£10** and **£20,** depending on their condition.

CONTRA: HARD CORPS (MEGA DRIVE)

The USA release ranges from **£50-£145,** while PAL *Probotector* versions are about **£200.** Japanese copies can sell for several hundred pounds.

EARTHWORM JIM 2 (SATURN)

Prices vary wildly depending on condition. Mint PAL copies cost as much as **£80,** while used copies can be as little as **£15.**

PILOTWINGS 64 (NINTENDO 64)

Loose PAL cart copies can cost under **£5,** with boxed and good condition copies ranging between **£20** and **£30.**

WARTECH: SENKO NO RONDE (XBOX 360)

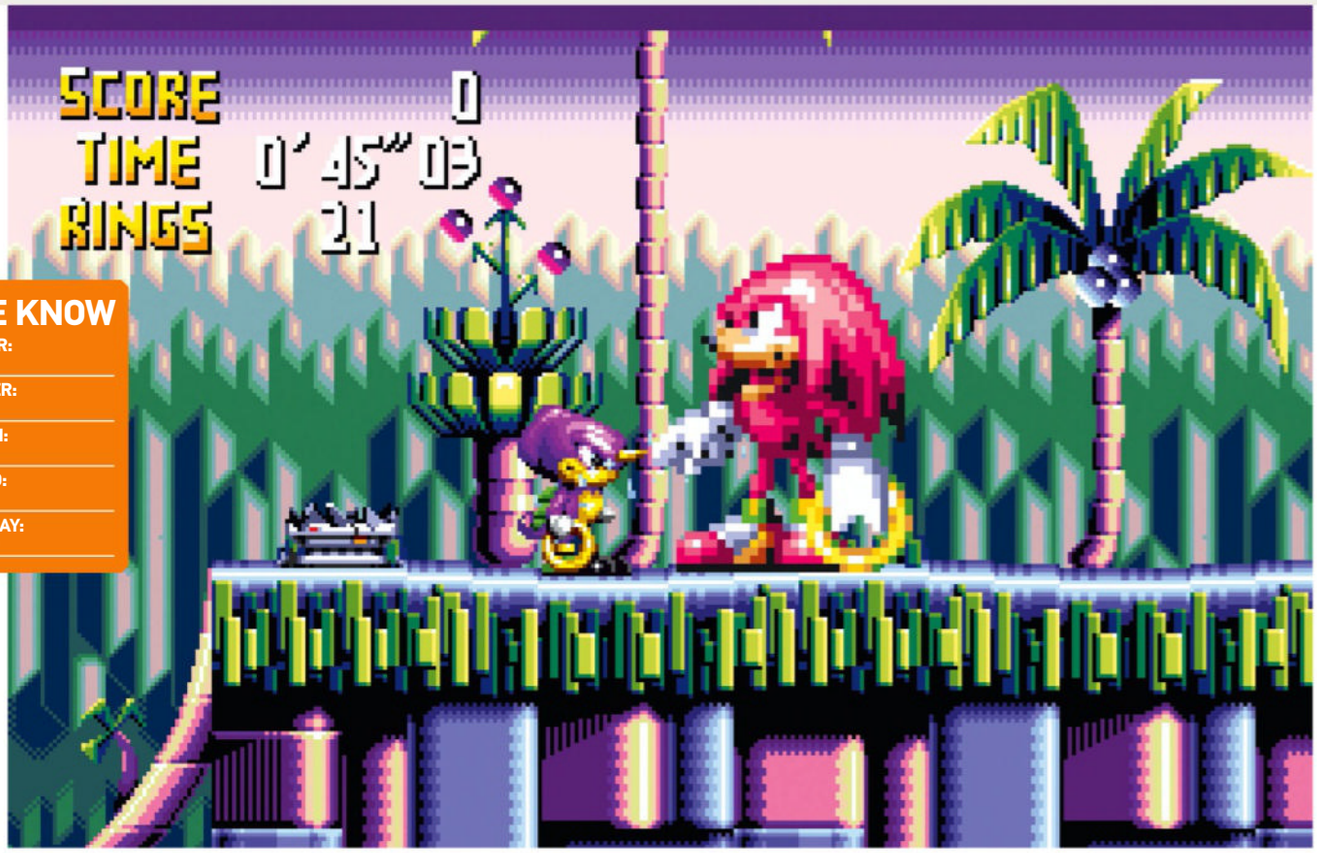
Sealed copies can set you back over **£50,** but patient shoppers can bag a used complete copy for under **£20.**

HOW MUCH?!

EARTHBOUND (SNES)

This edition of *EarthBound* recently sold for almost **£2,800** but was in great condition and included the extra scratch-and-sniff stickers that are usually missing.

Prices correct at time of print



» [32X] During the game, character sprites can be enlarged by using a power-up.

IN THE KNOW

- **» PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **» DEVELOPER:** SEGA CS3
- **» PLATFORM:** 32X
- **» RELEASED:** 1995
- **» PRICE TODAY:** £350+ (PAL)

KNUCKLES' CHAOTIX

Released on Sega's 32X add-on for the Mega Drive, Knuckles' Chaotix is a colourful 2D platformer that introduced some unique gameplay elements and new characters, as well as giving Knuckles his only ever starring role

Words by Faith Johnson

THE GAME

Knuckles has teamed up with the Chaotix Crew for a mission to thwart Dr Robotnik and Metal Sonic as they try to capture six Chaos Rings and take over a mystical island. The game is a lot like other *Sonic* games, featuring fast-paced platforming action and the bold, bright visuals that the series is known for.

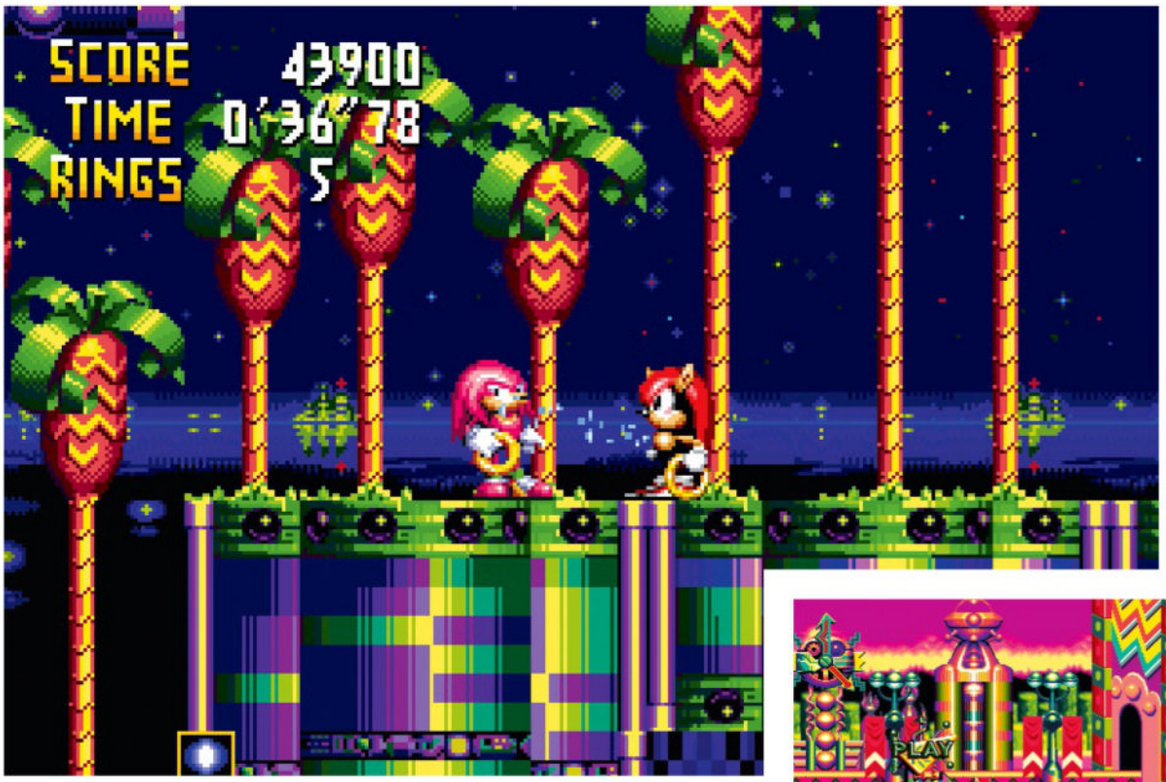
The biggest departure from the usual *Sonic* gameplay is that players use two characters at once, tethered together by a magic rubber band. This gives a new way to play a *Sonic* game and creates some unique gameplay mechanics to experiment with. Players can use a charge-up move to create a speed blast or throw their teammates upward to reach higher platforms. As with other games in the *Sonic* universe, each of the five levels is broken down into different acts. The acts take place across different times of the day, from morning, noon, evening and night, with the fifth being a big boss battle. Each time of day has unique décor and enemies to take on, and interestingly, acts aren't played linearly but are chosen at random until all are complete.

Using the extra power of the 32X, *Knuckles' Chaotix* is one of the best-looking *Sonic* games from the classic era and showcases lots of colourful levels as well as huge sprites, especially for the bosses that fill the screen at times. The game also has some longevity to it, with plenty of secrets and special stages to discover after finishing the main levels.

» [32X] No *Sonic* game could be complete without a dastardly plan involving Dr Robotnik.

THE QUALITY

Knuckles' Chaotix received mostly mixed reviews, with many reviewers saying that it made good use of the extra power of the 32X add-on, especially with the bright colour palette, but it was lacking. *SegaPro* gave it 84%, commenting that it was "a faster, more colourful *Sonic* with a good two-player option" and that it had "very impressive bonus stages and a zany cast of characters". *Sega Magazine UK* scored it 81% with Rich Leadbetter stating it was "endowed with a control mode that is a lot more original" than other *Sonic* titles, although there was "a lack of



» [32X] Levels have a theme consistent with other *Sonic* games, such as forests and factories.

enemy sprites". *CVG* said *Knuckles' Chaotix* "shows what the 32X can do" and that it had "stunning sub-games". However, its 75% review also mentioned that "the gameplay was lacking" and again, that there weren't enough enemies. *Next Generation* wasn't impressed, stating there were "too many colourful backgrounds, unimpressive attempts at showing off, and tiring gameplay" in its 2/5 rating.

WHY IT'S EXPENSIVE

Although the game was a decent 2D platformer with a unique design, *Knuckles' Chaotix* was released six months after the 32X appeared, and the device itself was discontinued shortly after. The gaming world had started looking towards 3D gaming, excitement for the PlayStation and Saturn was taking attention away from the ageing 16-bit consoles. Given that not many 32X units were sold, *Knuckles' Chaotix* cartridges were only produced in limited numbers, especially in Japanese and European regions, where the game commands the highest price today. Due to Sonic's enduring popularity, this one has now become a bit of a grail amongst Sonic collectors and is one of the rarest games in the series. Also, the game has never been released beyond the original cartridges, except in 2005 when it briefly appeared on the GameTap subscription service.

CHEAPER ALTERNATIVES

The least expensive way to play *Knuckles' Chaotix* today would be to track down a loose cartridge from the USA. While not cheap, these can be found for around £100 and do appear for sale quite regularly. Beyond that, you'll need to look at games that have the feel of the gameplay tropes, with any of the side-scrolling *Sonic* titles playing similarly, albeit without the unique tether mechanic. The closest you'll get is controlling both Sonic and Tails in *Sonic 3* (Mega Drive £30+) or playing as Knuckles in *Sonic & Knuckles* (Mega Drive £30+). You could also try *The Lost Vikings* on modern platforms, although this lacks the fast-paced platforming. Another choice would be *Sonic Heroes* (PlayStation 2, £10+), which makes use of multiple characters.

» [32X] The extra colour abilities of the 32X were used in full force for *Chaotix*.

» [32X] Special stages use the power of the 32X to create a vivid 3D effect.

THE BOTTOM LINE

This may not be the best *Sonic* game, but as a spin-off, it is a great alternative to the usual platforming tropes and has a visual style that really pops off the screen. It's also the only *Sonic* game for the 32X, and in a perfect world, Sega would release this in a *Sonic* collection, perhaps another *Sonic Gems* release. For the price, it's hard to recommend this one beyond those who already love Sonic or enjoy collecting 2D platforming titles. ✱

I'VE GOT IT!

These readers have knuckled down on their collecting chaos

Kara Jane Adams
I got given the PAL version free at some point in 2002 when a housemate gifted me his Mega Drive II, 32X, Mega-CD II, and a box full of games, with the line, "You're into this stuff aren't you?" I most definitely was.

Rain
I never had a 32X as a kid because *Chaotix* was the only game I wanted and my parents understandably didn't want to buy a system for one game. When I could buy my own games it was an early purchase on eBay in 2000 for a UK version at £40, way before the price went through the roof!

Alex Oatley
I got it, and the 32X itself, in 2010. I found the 32X at a local game shop, and *Knuckles Chaotix* (complete, US version) on Amazon Marketplace. They were about $30 apiece. The used game market has apparently gone very crazy since then.

Dan 'The Mega' Driver
I finally got my copy a few years back, I imported from the US since my 32X is region free and the game is generally less rare in America and more affordable. It still cost me over £100 after taxes and shipping, but even without the original box it was cheaper than local copies!

Dan
I DID have it back in the day when the 32X was seen as junk by many. It cost me £5 and to be honest, I just didn't enjoy it very much, so at the time when I had to bulk clear most of my original collection, selling it didn't really bother me. Hindsight is wonderful but apart from its potential value I don't really feel that I'm missing out!!

MY RETRO LIFE

PERSONAL STORIES ABOUT OUR **SHARED PASSION**

GAMING 101

Adam Barnes formulates the perfect gaming education for his kids

Back when my kids were small(er), we'd agreed mutually that they should have a wholesome, unconnected upbringing. They've a lifetime to settle into phone addiction and an ever-digital life; better to keep them separate from it while we can. That meant wooden toys and no screentime, whole foods and connection with nature. Any parent will tell you, such values are the first to slip away when lack of sleep and a moody toddler barrage your sense of self.

What I'd failed to overlook is the fact that my job has always been in and around videogames, and with home office so commonplace it was frankly naive to think a total block on screentime was ever viable. More recently, I've been working on a WWII RTS game and it did often occur that both my kids would gleefully shout, "Tanks! Tanks! Tanks!" as they ran over to watch me playing it.

I won't deny that I enjoyed the excitement: it is my work, and I'm happy if my kids can take some joy in it. But despite my best efforts to control the exposure to games and screentime as a whole, it did become a habit of watching a German Panther turn a group of Sherman Fireflies to scrap. Not the most appropriate for kids as young as them, I figured. But it was also something that they couldn't be involved with. The oldest liked to control the camera with WASD, but that was the extent of it. Even when I switched to more tranquil, child-appropriate games such as *Mini Motorways*, their interaction amounted to very little. All these modern games were just a bit unwieldy for them.

So it struck me. I should go back to the era when I was first playing games, back when even my four-year-old fingers could complete a level. So I dug out my Mega Drive, dusted off *Sonic* and had the blue hedgehog spin-jumping through Green Hill Zone like it was 1991. Progression was slow, but enjoyment was high. I let the oldest have a go first rather than taking the lead, I knew him to be frustrated easily and if he saw how 'easy' it could be, it could've been an end to the experiment. I later realised I'd chosen *Sonic* as the first game out of some kind of subconscious history lesson, "Listen boys, get to know this game, it's *important*!" But that did get me thinking about what would be next… what *should* be next? I was already hyped about the next game to introduce.

Luckily I'm not short on Mega Drive classics, and already we've had a blast with *Micro Machines* and *Columns* and had a quick bout on *Bomberman*. I'm trying to not introduce too many games at once, in part because I'd like to avoid overstimulating them. But also there's a stubbornness in my head here: why should they get all these great games at once, when I had to make the very most of a single game for months before another might make its way into the console? I want them to appreciate the games, and deter into this consumer culture that has become the modern games industry.

> "Why should they get all these great games at once?"
> **ADAM BARNES**

I'm taking my time, then, but I've still put a plan together.

BABY'S FIRST GAME(S)

THE GAMES THAT INTRODUCED MY KIDS INTO THE WORLD OF GAMING

SUDDEN STRIKE 5

At the risk of sounding like a shill, this is the game I'm currently working on. It has everything a child could want: planes, trains, automobiles… and tanks.

MINI MOTORWAYS

Here I tried to choose something a little more low-key, a little more chill. It helped that they already had a good idea of what traffic meant.

FLORIDA INTERSTATE '86

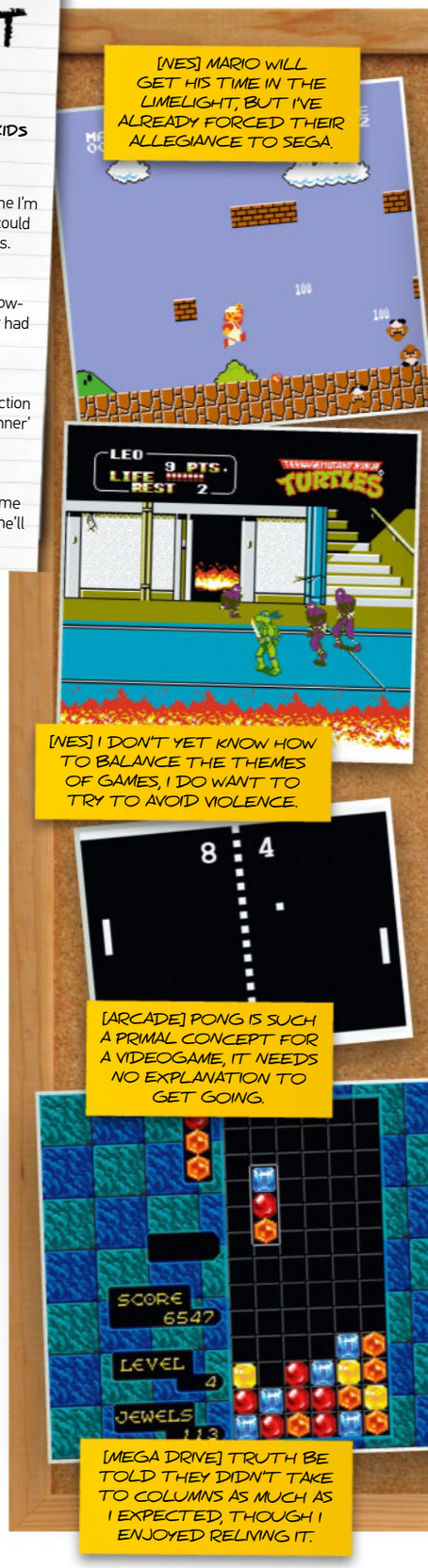
Solely developed by a colleague, this upped the action with its *Out Run*-style, Miami-infused endless 'runner' gameplay. My boys were instantly hooked.

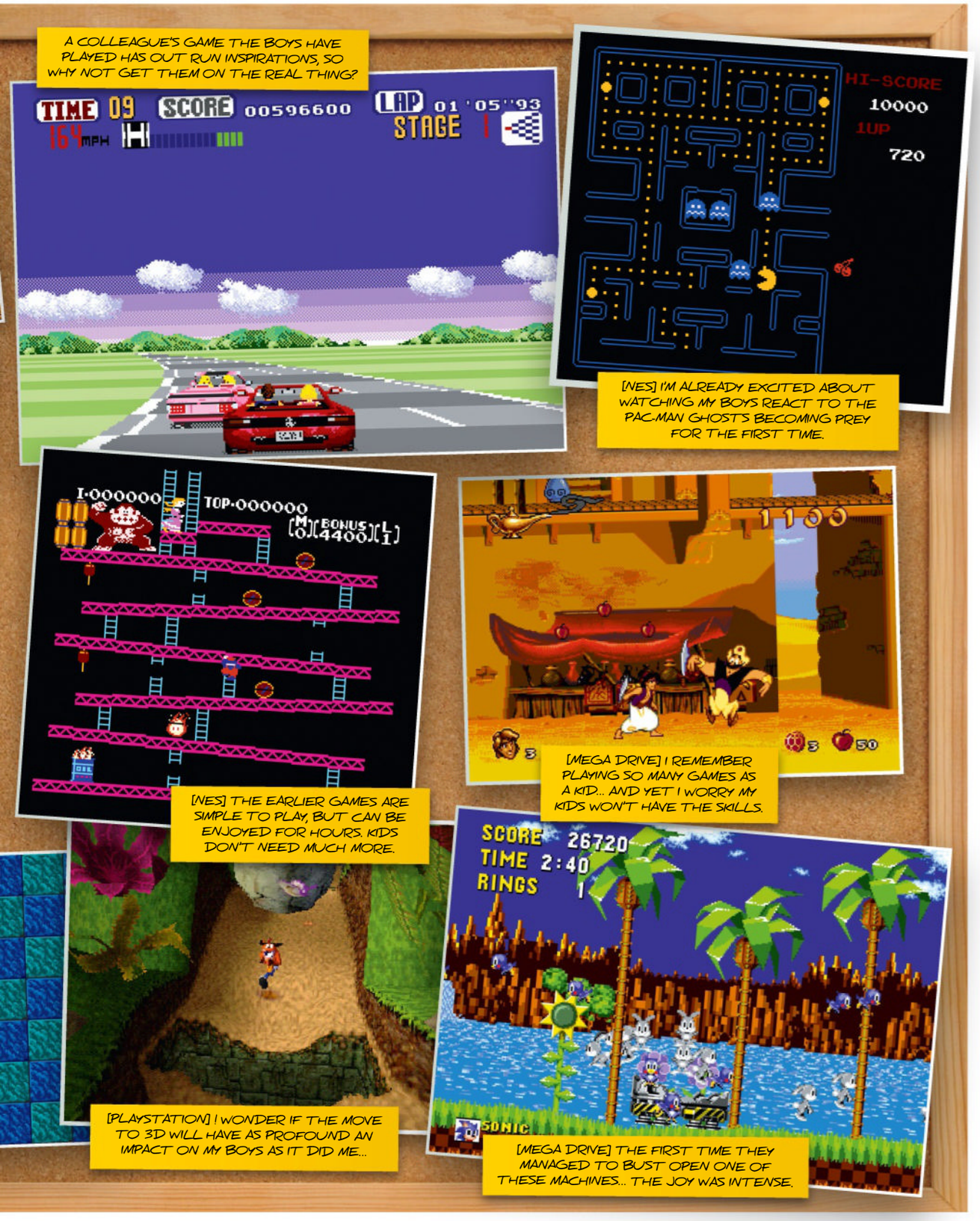
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG

You can't go wrong with the blue blur. He sorted me for a good portion of my childhood, and it seems he'll do the same for my kids too.

An in-development but already concise list of 'must-plays' that we can experience together. For this I need to step back a bit; I was hasty with the Mega Drive so immediately and I need to go back a bit further, get them understanding *Pac-Man*, *Space Invaders*, *Pong*, before we can progress. Then I'll bring out the NES Mini, get them growing up on true classics: *Zelda*, *Super Mario Bros*, *Donkey Kong*. Then I'll get into the meat of it: SNES, Mega Drive, PlayStation… the treasures from these alone could see us through another half a decade alone, more if I'm less picky about what defines a 'must-play'. And yes, I do already have an Excel sheet tracking what I need to buy. [Good man – Ed]

Any father reading this will likely recognise the joy that I'm writing this from right now. Because this isn't just a chance to relive each of the classics of my own childhood, but to re-experience them through my children's eyes, witness that same first-time excitement that I cannot ever experience for myself again. My collated list of must-plays isn't just an attempt at giving my kids an education in videogame history, nor to ease them into the world of modern videogames; in truth, it's to fall in love with gaming all over again.


[NES] MARIO WILL GET HIS TIME IN THE LIMELIGHT, BUT I'VE ALREADY FORCED THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO SEGA.
LEO
LIFE
REST 2
9 PTS.
TURTLES
[NES] I DON'T YET KNOW HOW TO BALANCE THE THEMES OF GAMES, I DO WANT TO TRY TO AVOID VIOLENCE.
8 4
[ARCADE] PONG IS SUCH A PRIMAL CONCEPT FOR A VIDEOGAME, IT NEEDS NO EXPLANATION TO GET GOING.
SCORE
6547
LEVEL
4
JEWELS
113
[MEGA DRIVE] TRUTH BE TOLD THEY DIDN'T TAKE TO COLUMNS AS MUCH AS I EXPECTED, THOUGH I ENJOYED RELIVING IT.


A COLLEAGUE'S GAME THE BOYS HAVE PLAYED HAS OUT RUN INSPIRATIONS, SO WHY NOT GET THEM ON THE REAL THING?
TIME 09
SCORE 00596600
LAP 01'05"93
STAGE 1
164 MPH
HI-SCORE 10000
1UP 720
[NES] I'M ALREADY EXCITED ABOUT WATCHING MY BOYS REACT TO THE PAC-MAN GHOST'S BECOMING PREY FOR THE FIRST TIME.
I-000000
TOP-000000
BONUS 4400
[NES] THE EARLIER GAMES ARE SIMPLE TO PLAY, BUT CAN BE ENJOYED FOR HOURS. KIDS DON'T NEED MUCH MORE.
[MEGA DRIVE] I REMEMBER PLAYING SO MANY GAMES AS A KID... AND YET I WORRY MY KIDS WON'T HAVE THE SKILLS.
[PLAYSTATION] I WONDER IF THE MOVE TO 3D WILL HAVE AS PROFOUND AN IMPACT ON MY BOYS AS IT DID ME...
SCORE 26720
TIME 2:40
RINGS 1
[MEGA DRIVE] THE FIRST TIME THEY MANAGED TO BUST OPEN ONE OF THESE MACHINES... THE JOY WAS INTENSE.

READER'S REACT

How did you start your kids on games?

LuisCipherMstar
I started my kids with arcade games when they were little and we had some arcade cabinets at home. After they caught the gaming bug, they went on to the earlier gaming consoles, then onto PC later in life. Now we have grandkids, so rinse and repeat. Bam! New gamers are born again.

Dunktech
Sonic The Hedgehog on the Mega Drive was always a hit with mine. Then they discovered *Roblox*...

RuneMakes
My son started on *Super Mario World* as a two, almost four year old. As a huge Nintendo fan, it made me so proud when he could actually beat a level by himself. I think it was a good choice difficulty wise as well, as he now, almost six years old, favours games like *Mega Man X* over something like *Bluey*.

LeChuck Rising
I started mine out on simple old-school games. Their favourites were *Excitebike* and *Super Mario Bros*. I then moved them onto the 16-bit era platformers and now they're on modern systems. I think starting out old school made them appreciate the modern games more than they would have had I started them there.

David
The first videogame my daughter ever completed was *Bloodborne*. She was a month old and spent all of it on my lap asleep, but it still counts as far as I'm concerned. These days, she's seven and I've brought her mom's old DS back to life for her to play. She's a big *Scribblenauts* fan!

WodjerNL
School teacher here. When we're talking about games and gaming, I get them playing *Manic Miner* online – at first they're hesitant – then the competition between them kicks in...

Andy Bell
Pac-Man, via *Pac-Man Collection* on the GBA when they were four. They struggled with the controls being abstracted from screen and the avatar, but could do all sorts of amazing things on a tablet game.

MAILBAG

HAVE YOUR SAY... SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON SOCIAL MEDIA – **TWITTER.COM/RETROGAMER_MAG**

WIN!

Every month, one lucky writer-in will receive a copy of one of our classic retro books from our archives. Good luck everyone!

STAR LETTER

A HASTY DECISION

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

I recently went through a phase of getting an N64, originally just for *Diddy Kong Racing*, as I had excellent memories of playing it in my youth. However, this quickly evolved into a few more games, some cheap, some big hitters, then the dreaded bug of getting the best picture quality out of it. So I got a RGB Tim Worthington mod done, added the Expansion Pak, Rumble Pak and Controller Pak, and before I knew it, I was hundreds of pounds into the black hole of N64 collecting. [I've certainly been there – Ed]

I then had a realisation at my friend's house doing some four-player action on *GoldenEye* that all this effort was not worth it and I should just use the Nintendo Switch with some additional controllers, as the experience would have been cheaper, smoother, and a lot easier to set-up (RGB to HDMI was a lot of messing round). I wish I had not let my frantic/random buying get away with me and just took a step back and think of the alternatives instead. This realisation unfortunately only hit me after I had finished with the N64 then moved onto the PS1 and I'm now halfway through the Dreamcast! Ultimately I love gaming but it does drive me mad at times, I'm actually sitting here thinking do I have an addiction to buying them! Anyway, I love the magazine. You keep highlighting all the great games I have missed, which I then go and buy. Hang on, does this make you my drug dealer?

Kind Regards,

Alan Jenkins

Thanks for writing in, Alan. Your intense focus on gaming sounds quite similar to Darran's. Ultimately, if your collecting isn't affecting others or leading to debt then do what makes you happy. While we don't give out drugs, we can send you a book. Just don't buy everything in it.

» [Nintendo 64] Collecting games is always great fun, but try not to let it get out of hand.

» It's always nice to see what games were popular with our readers in Europe. We certainly know of some of these.

TIME TO PLAY GAUL

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

Despite my name, I am half-French/half-Italian. Like most French youngsters of the Nineties, I grew up with the iconic Franco-Belgium comic books, and also played some of those games, most of which were made by Infogrames. I just wanted to share my collection with you. Have you played any of them? I can strongly recommend *Asterix & Obelix* on the SNES (I have the GBA port called *Asterix & Obelix: Bash Them All*). An expectations warning though, *Asterix* on the PlayStation is literally *Risk* (the board game), at least 90% of it. That was quite a frustrating reality for an eight year old who just wanted to bash some Romans!

Kind regards,

Matteo Fossi

Thanks so much for sharing your curated collection with us, Matteo. Darran's not played any of the titles you've shared, but both he and Nick used to enjoy the *Asterix* games that came out on the Master System.

GAMING TODAY: IS IT GOOD?

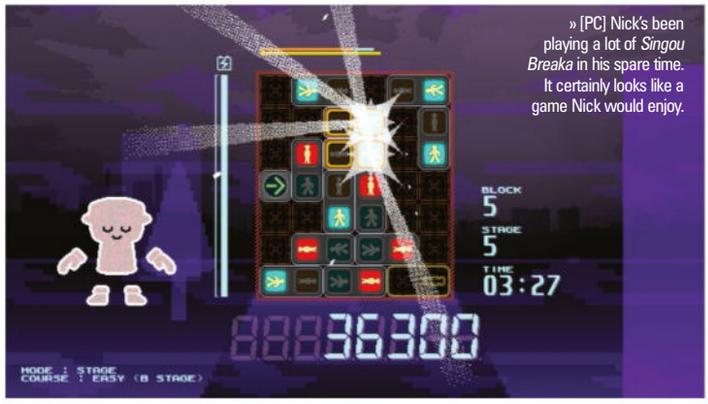
Hi **Retro Gamer**,

What's your opinion of the current state of gaming? I'm still mainly a fan of single-player RPGs but I've had my fair share of fun with online gaming, with a healthy dose of 16-bit retro gaming thrown in. Meanwhile my kids have gone from playing lots of *Fortnite*, to the latest craze, *Roblox*. Whilst I admire the social factor of these games, and I've had plenty of laughs playing with my kids on these games, it feels to me there's a lot less imagination in gaming, and a lot more monetisation. That being said, as long as mags like you help keep retro gaming alive, the more years pass, the wider a gaming library becomes.

Cheers,

Luke Middleham

While everyone on the team does enjoy modern games, we tend to stay away from those like the ones you mentioned. Darran has turned into a Steam Deck bore, Nick plays new games, but they're often retro



» [PC] Nick's been playing a lot of *Singou Breaka* in his spare time. It certainly looks like a game Nick would enjoy.

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in looks or tied to old series, like *Virtua Fighter*, Tim enjoys rinsing Game Pass games, while Andy is into hardcore modding.

MAGAZINE CRAFT FOREVER

Dear **Retro Gamer**,

As a long-term subscriber to your magazine and a collector of gaming magazines from the Nineties onwards – my collection contains the full run of *Total!*, *Mega* and *Ultimate Future Gaming*, to name but a few – it goes without saying that one of my favourite articles is Magazine Craft and I would just like to thank you for interviewing Steve Jarratt.

I loved reading about his career, the process of meeting deadlines, and working with Sega and Sony. I was/am a massive fan of *Total!*, and it is due to Steve's writing style that I originally wanted to become a magazine writer, so much so that I used to spend my time outside of school writing reviews of games I had played and also writing a wrestling fanzine.

As I got older, I still followed Steve's work from *Edge*, *OPM* and *T3*, and have also read a few of the Bitmap books he has worked on. While I never did become a writer, I would be grateful if you could pass on my gratitude to Steve for making me fall in love with magazines and writing in general.

Keep up the good work on the magazine, and I look forward to reading it for many years to come.

» Magazine Craft continues to be one of our most popular features with readers.

DISCUSSED THIS MONTH

Analogue 3D

We've not had that much time with it yet (hence no review) but rest assured, the Analogue 3D is a very nice piece of kit. Darran is currently testing his 67 NTSC games on it and borrowed some PAL carts and has been making his friends test numerous four-player games with him. Nick has become a lot more interested in the device after seeing the Boost Mode in action, calling the *Perfect Dark* comparisons "night and day". You'll find a full review in our next issue, but it currently feels like another home run from Analogue.

Kind regards
Darren Levesley

We're glad you enjoyed the article, Darren. We passed your kind words on to Steve who really appreciated them.

Your say

Every month, Retro Gamer asks a question on social media and prints the best replies. This month we wanted to know…

What's your favourite Nintendo 64 game?

VirtualAlex
Wave Race 64 is a game I have been coming back to for decades. Amazing chill beach vibes juxtapose the Minnesota winter. I love its pick-up-and-play nature, and very challenging tournament mode.

MadMan-inc
San Francisco Rush 2, just the stunt course. I could play that for hours.

Jamie Harris
Outside of the obvious games I'll have to say *Mystical Ninja Starring Goemon*. I'd never played anything like it before. The odd humour and storyline, great gameplay and a fantastically quirky soundtrack. Shame there'll likely never be a rerelease.

Lazarus93x
Mine would be *Conker's Bad Fur Day*! It was one of my faves growing up and very edgy and cute at the time!

MYST+
Ocarina Of Time. This isn't meant to be as depressing as it sounds – I was very lonely as a child and found deep solace within *OOT*. Its characters became like friends to me, its landscape a familiar, comforting place, almost like home, its music speaking to my heart. I will always cherish it.

The Handlebar Gamer
Wave Race 64. Those water effects – there was nothing like it. Water effects in games were flat/textured nonsense. This felt like real water and the physics made it all that more impressive.

Martin Whitehouse
I quite enjoyed *Banjo-Kazooie*. Simple, good clean fun with a bit of devilish humour. The transformations and amount to collect were great and Grant Kirkhope's score is memorable!

Rob Crowther
It's got to be *GoldenEye*! We used to have '*GoldenEye* nights' in the late-Nineties, 4v4 on the big telly. Later, when we got proper PCs, these evolved into LAN parties.

ACO
For a typical answer: *Ocarina Of Time*. A non-typical answer? Either *Gauntlet Legends* or *Star Wars: Rogue Squadron*.

MegaApple
Bomberman 64 and *Bomberman Hero* are some of the most charming games on the console.

Cherry Lambrini
There are several excellent titles for the N64, but only one I replay on an almost annual basis, which is *The Legend Of Zelda Ocarina Of Time*. It's incredible how well it holds up, from the gameplay, the visuals, story and music. It's a fantastic game that I come back to again and again.

Kev James
Banjo-Kazooie, I can't tell you how many times I finished it and it's the main reason I ended up buying a Xbox 360. A huge shout out to *Tonic Trouble* and *Buck Bumble*, as I spent a good number of hours playing them as well.

Pepper
Super Smash Bros is my favourite. It was incredible being able to fight with some of Nintendo's best and iconic characters for the first time. A wild concept that has spanned a massive series. Getting to beat the crap out of Nes whilst using Pikachu, still sounds bizarre saying that.

Llama King
Super Mario 64. The game was ground-breaking when it was released. It truly felt like you were in the Mushroom Kingdom and even now I see gameplay and it takes me back.

» [Nintendo 64] There's a lot of love for *Wave Race 64*, which makes sense, as it's amazing.

retro GAMER

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13 HIT
H-LASER
Changpo
NikBiodroid

5 WarTech: Senko No Ronde

A GAME OF ROUNDERS

» RETROREVIVAL

» XBOX 360 » 2007 » G.REV

As a frequent importer of Dreamcast games, I came to love a small studio called G.Rev. If you don't know the name, you might know the games, as the team was key to many of the best shoot-'em-ups of the era – as well as releasing *Border Down* and *Under Defeat*, G.Rev assisted Treasure with *Ikaruga* and *Gradius V*. However, the game I was most interested in was *Senko No Ronde*, an arcade release that combined concepts from fighting games and shoot-'em-ups. Like the company's other Dreamcast releases, it ran on the Naomi arcade board and would have been an easy port. Sadly, that never happened.

Fast forward to December 2007, and I'm in Game, having just received my Xbox 360 as a birthday gift. I had plenty of games to dive into but I was still interested in what was out there, and it was while browsing the shelves that I saw *WarTech* – a bland name for a game with bland cover art, and one I wouldn't have given a second thought had I not spotted the familiar G.Rev logo in the bottom-right corner. I flipped the box and got a huge surprise – this was the game I'd been following, one that I assumed would remain import-only as G.Rev's previous games had. Needless to say I snapped it up right there.

Thankfully, it was everything I'd hoped for after all that anticipation. Plenty of people have likened it to a 2D *Virtual On*, and that seems fair as the way your Rounder robots dash around and occasionally come in for melee attacks certainly gives off that feeling. I also finally understood why it had to be on Xbox 360. Xbox Live was the next best thing to the competitive arcade environment the game was designed for, and my rare encounters with Japanese players online left me convinced that I'd have gotten wrecked in any Akihabara arcade – but I'd have loved it. ✱

ENDGAME

FIGHTING VIPERS – TOKIO'S ENDING (SATURN, 1996)

» Sega AM2's series may have been short-lived, but its caged arenas, faster pace and armour system made it a welcome alternative to its more conservative sibling series, *Virtua Fighter*. Better yet, it actually had unique character endings, so let's follow ex-gang leader Tokio and see what he does after he's beaten Armstone City's finest fighters to a pulp.

01

» Here's our victor, hanging out in his stage with the plane that flies over it. Well, it does in the arcade version, but not the Saturn version. This is how you can tell Tokio is a bit of a jerk.

02

» Being a bit of a ne'er-do-well and the winner of a fighting tournament, Tokio is comfortable in dark alleyways covered in graffiti. Heck, it's essentially his natural environment.

03

» What else would a delinquent do but head to an arcade? You can see he's playing *Virtua Fighter 3* here, and there's a *Sonic The Fighters* poster – neither game came to the Saturn.

04

» He's won a fighting tournament in real life. He's beaten *Virtua Fighter 3* in the arcade. What's left for Tokio to do? Why, conquer the music industry, of course. He knows he's going to be a success, because he's already managed to sort out a killer album cover – just look at that close-up photo.

05

» Sadly for Tokio, he's not nearly as good at singing as he is punching people, and his album sells 27 copies. Worse yet, his mum bought almost half of those as gifts for relatives. When *Fighting Vipers 2* rolls around in 1998, Tokio is more than glad of the opportunity to resume fighting.

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